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INDIA TODAY

CAN YOGI MAKE HISTORY?

HIS BID TO BE THE FIRST UTTAR PRADESH CM SINCE 1985 TO WIN A CONSECUTIVE TERM FACES STIFF RESISTANCE FROM ARCH-RIVAL AKHILESH YADAV. AN ON-THE-SPOT REPORT

YOGI ADITYANATH
CM, Uttar Pradesh

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FROM THE

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

When the BJP high command anointed the mahant of the Gorakhnath Math as the chief minister of Uttar Pradesh on March 19, 2017, after the party swept an assembly election it went into without naming a chief ministerial face, it came as a big surprise to the nattering nabobs who love speculating on such matters. In that election, the BJP won 312 of the state's 403 seats, the biggest win since Indira Gandhi's 309-seat haul in 1980. That election was won solely on the strength of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's charisma despite the demonetisation-induced distress just six months earlier threatening to damage the BJP's prospects. The landslide victory gave the party a free hand to appoint anyone of its choosing as the CM. Although the choice of Yogi Adityanath may have seemed a curious one, and the Gorakhnath Math mahant looked an outlier in Indian politics, appearances were deceptive. Yogi, 49, was no stranger to politics. A seasoned politician, he was the youngest Lok Sabha MP in 1998 and had represented Gorakhpur five consecutive times by 2014. After five years in office, he is still younger than when Narendra Modi took over as the chief minister of Gujarat at age 51. The responsibilities on Yogi's shoulders are far greater. An encore in UP will validate the party's model of good governance and Hindutva. And given that 2017 was the last major state election the BJP won decisively, a big win will help the party build the momentum that will perhaps see it through the other critical state elections. It also requires MLAs to shore up its numbers in the Rajya Sabha ahead of the presidential election mid-2022. UP thus is mission critical for the party and its election-fighting strategy.

April 10, 2017

The electoral frenzy in India has already begun and will last until the 2024 Lok Sabha election. Sixteen, or more than half, of India's states will go to polls between now and May 2024. The most electorally significant of them is UP, one of five states where the first round of polling begins on February 10. With 80 Lok Sabha seats and 403 legislators who elect 31 Rajya Sabha MPs, the state is the beating heart of India's parliamentary democracy. Nine of India's 15 prime ministers were elected to the Lok Sabha from here. It has been the ground zero of two of India's biggest political movements in recent history—the Mandir agitation that heralded the rise of the BJP, and the Mandal stir that propelled the rise of caste-based parties like the Bahujan Samaj Party and Samajwadi Party. Whichever party controls the state, it can be safely said, directs the trajectory of Indian politics. No one knows this better than Prime Minister Modi and his home minister Amit Shah. The Ayodhya movement catapulted the BJP from a two-seat party in 1984 to a 120-seat one in 1991. In 2014, Modi contested the Lok Sabha election from Varanasi while Shah was the state party in-charge. The BJP won a remarkable 71 of the state's 80 seats, or 25 per cent of the overall 282 seats it won. The tally came down somewhat in 2019, to 62 seats in UP, but was still 20 per cent of the BJP's 303-seat score.

This time, the party is using the Ram temple construction and Kashi redevelopment project to push Hindutva among its core constituents. The chief minister's statement that this will be an "80 versus 20" election is being construed as an attempt to polarise voters—a charge he denies.

The BJP's electoral narrative pitches a Yogi-Modi 'double engine model' of economic development espoused by two charismatic leaders working in sync. They continue to rely on their strategy of aggressive welfarism that includes giving free food grains during the pandemic, providing affordable housing, paying massive arrears to farmers and myriad other schemes targeting the poor. And where there are elections, caste calculations cannot be far behind, especially in UP. The BJP has worked assiduously to broaden its traditional Brahmin-Bania base to woo other backward classes like the Nishads. It has attempted to nurture leaders from the extremely backward classes and allied with two minor caste-based parties.

Ranged against Yogi are some equally colourful contestants—political dynasts Akhilesh Yadav, Jayant Chaudhary and Priyanka Gandhi, and one inheritor, BSP chief Mayawati. Akhilesh, though, remains the biggest challenger as he seems to have converted an apparently multi-polar contest into a binary battle. The SP scion, only the second CM to complete a full term in office, had fought the 2017 election jointly with the Congress. In the 2019 general election, he added BSP to the alliance. He failed both times. Akhilesh's rebooted strategy this time sees him going solo, allying only with Jayant Chaudhary's Rashtriya Lok Dal in Jat-dominated western UP. He can count on the Muslim-Yadav vote that helped his father Mulayam rule the state for three non-consecutive terms. Muslims make up 20 per cent of the state's population, so even half these numbers could help him win. He stunned the BJP by luring three significant OBC leaders. He, too, is playing the caste game—expanding his traditional vote banks by allying with six smaller parties. The fact that the Election Commission has banned rallies for three weeks and may extend it could work in Akhilesh's favour, as it denies the BJP its biggest weapon—the Modi rally.

The pandemic hasn't helped Yogi either. Development has come to a standstill, and the state economy hit hard. The government is battling anti-incumbency and hard-to-forget visuals of the Covid dead floating down the Ganga last year. What may initially have seemed a cakewalk for Yogi and the BJP now looks an uphill climb. Our cover story, 'Can Yogi Make History?', by Group Editorial Director (Publishing) Raj Chengappa with Special Correspondent Prashant Srivastava, views this contest through the eyes of a man who is the fulcrum of the BJP's electoral strategy. If Yogi wins, he will make history and become the first UP CM since 1985 to be re-elected for a consecutive term.

An electoral victory could become a springboard for Yogi to leap into national politics. Yogi, go the whispers, could become a contender to replace Narendra Modi as PM in the not-so-distant future. Our Mood of the Nation 2022 poll, in fact, shows him neck-and-neck with home minister Shah as a likely successor to Modi. It remains to be seen how far this dark horse will go. Will he be the BJP's white knight? Like his anointment as chief minister five years ago, anything is possible in Indian politics.

(Aroon Purie)

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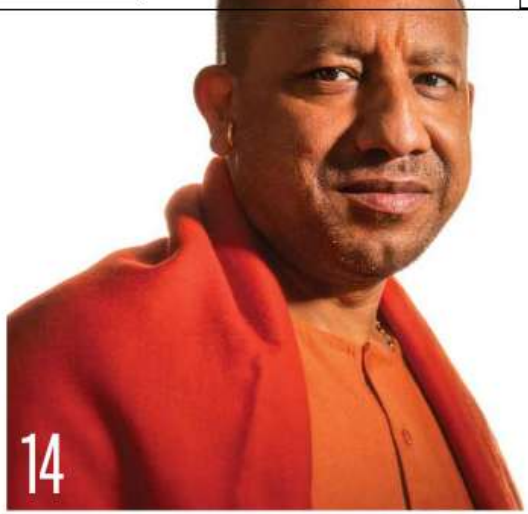

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UPFRONT

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5G NETWORKS

REDEFINING REAL TIME

By M.G. Arun

Imagine being able to watch a live cricket match on your mobile phone in real time with no lag (or 'network latency')—or being able to do so while travelling from one end of your city to another with no disruption. Should India's telcos see a trouble-free rollout of their 5G networks, that might well become a reality in the country. For now, the Centre's DoT (Department of Telecommunications) has allotted test spectrum to various companies for testing and validation of their technologies, and plans to conduct auctions for 5G spectrum by July.

According to the DoT, 5G will at first be made available in 13 cities across India in 2022—Delhi, Gurugram, Bengaluru, Kolkata, Mumbai, Chandigarh, Jamnagar, Ahmedabad, Chennai, Hyderabad, Lucknow, Pune and Gandhinagar. India's three top telcos—Reliance Jio, Airtel and Vodafone Idea—have already set up 5G trial sites in some cities to ensure they are war-ready to use the spectrum and infrastructure (optic fibre cables, etc.) that is to be brought online this year.

Reliance Jio, India's largest cellular operator, with 429.5 million

Illustration by NILANJAN DAS

subscribers in September 2021, has said it has completed plans for coverage in 1,000 cities. Its rollout model is based on targeting customer consumption revenue via precise coverage planning. In November, Bharti Airtel conducted a 5G test in partnership with Nokia on the outskirts of Kolkata, while Vodafone Idea conducted similar trials in Gandhinagar in December. According to media reports, over the next two years, India will also see the installation of some 800,000 new mobile towers to facilitate the 5G rollout. There are also plans to connect up to 70 per cent of the towers using fibre optic cables by March 2024, up from the current 34 per cent.

A study conducted by Viavi Solutions, a US-based telecom network company, in February 2021, found that commercial 5G was available in 1,336 cities in 61 countries across the globe, a huge increase from the only 376 cities that had the technology the previous year. China topped the list of the most connected cities, followed by the US and South Korea. Other countries in the pecking order, as per the study, included the UK, Spain, Canada, Australia, Saudi Arabia, Italy and France.

The three major benefits of 5G, as touted by telecom operators and equipment providers, are its high bandwidth, its low latency or response time and the higher density of connections it allows. As far as bandwidth is concerned, while 4G handles about 200 megabytes (MB) of data per second, 5G can handle up to one gigabyte (1,000 MB) per second or higher. When it comes to response time—the time it takes to begin loading a page or a video after clicking a link—4G has a 100 millisecond delay, while 5G gets the job done in one millisecond, or essentially, in real time. 5G networks can also handle much higher traffic—allowing about 10 times as many device connections per square kilometre as existing networks.

The possibilities of such efficient and fast internet networks are enormous. In some countries, 5G will power autonomous vehicles, giving them a real-time awareness of every other vehicle on the road, as well as of traffic signals, linking them 'intelligently' across the IoT (the Internet of Things, the network of internet-connected devices that runs somewhat parallel to the Internet we use to access social media, search engines, streaming services and so on). "With a confluence of technologies (IoT, big data, AI, etc.) maturing together, 5G is set to be a game changer for telecom and is expected to yield enormous economic opportunities over the next three to five years," says K.G. Purushothaman, partner and sector head of telecom at KPMG India. According to a KPMG International survey in 2020, the arrival of enterprise 5G will impact firms in almost every sector, and has the potential to unlock $4.8 trillion (Rs 358 lakh crore) of economic potential across the globe. In India, that figure is estimated at $48.7 billion (Rs 3.6 lakh crore) by 2023, with 5G contributing some 0.35-0.50 per cent to annual GDP.

Currently, Indian telcos use spectrum in the 800, 900, 1,800, 2,100 and 2,300 MHz bands to offer 4G connectivity. These can be repurposed for 5G, while the Centre has also earmarked spectrum in the 3,300-3,600 MHz bands for the new networks. On the consumer side of matters, Bharti Airtel had in 2020 urged the DoT to issue guidelines for new 5G handsets to ensure that all new models can connect to all the new 5G spectrum bands. Aside from the higher frequencies, 5G networks also operate on different architecture—instead of relying on large towers, they organise into clusters of small cells and use a principle called 'beamforming' to boost the efficiency of transmissions.

However, the rollout of new networks has renewed concerns about the safety of cellular transmission. Critics describe even existing mobile towers as akin to running powerful, unshielded microwave ovens above residential and commercial areas, pointing out that there are no definitive studies on the effect of such radiation on human health. On the other hand, even 5G's highest frequency radiation falls into the 'non-ionising' category, unlike the x-rays and gamma rays that we know are harmful. These signals also lose power rapidly over small distances. In terms of human safety, the US CDC (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention) says, "At this time we do not have the science to link health problems to cell phone use", be it for 3G, 4G or 5G networks.

In the US, there have also been concerns around the rollout of new 5G networks because of the effect they could have on frequencies used by air traffic. The CEOs of major US passenger and cargo carriers on January 17 warned that they ran the risk of a 'catastrophic' aviation crisis when cellular carriers AT&T and Verizon deployed their new 5G services near some airports. These worries also led Air India to cancel several of its flights to that country.

What is for certain is that 5G is not simply a matter of faster internet—the scale-up in cellular capability from 4G to 5G networks could reshape how mobile devices and people connect to each other and to the internet. And while India is late to the 5G party, given the number of subscribers in the domestic market, it has a good chance of becoming a leading player in this sector. ■

WHY 5G MATTERS

$4.8 TRILLION
(Rs 358 lakh crore)
The economic potential of 5G by 2023, as per a report by KPMG

$48.7 BILLION
(Rs 3.6 lakh crore)
The economic potential of 5G in India by 2023

BENEFITS

HIGH BANDWIDTH: While 4G can handle about 200 megabytes (MB) of data per second, 5G can handle up to one gigabyte (1,000 MB) per second or more

LOW LATENCY: The response time, or the time a network takes to 'respond to a click', is 100 milliseconds on 4G networks, but just one millisecond on 5G

DENSER NETWORK: 5G networks can handle 10 times the number of devices per square kilometre that 4G can

Illustration by SIDDHANT JUMDE

GLASSHOUSE

NETAS AND NETAJI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi recently pulled off a coup of sorts when he announced his plan to instal a 25-ft high granite statue of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose in New Delhi this August. The PM cast a hologram on January 23, the freedom fighter's 125th birth anniversary, at the chosen site near India Gate. West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee, seething over the Centre dropping her state's Republic Day tableau, which also featured Bose, isn't giving up on the freedom fighter though. She has announced the naming of three universities after Netaji, the erection of an Azad Hind monument, a museum of heroes from the freedom struggle and an annual celebration of Bose's birth anniversary. Bose was sometimes called the freedom fighter India forgot. No longer, it seems.

A Close Watch

Gujarat BJP president **C.R. Patil**, a former policeman, knows how to make a watertight case. His recently reconstituted party core group includes Chief Minister Bhupendra Patel but excludes former chief minister Vijay Rupani. The Patil-Rupani rivalry is an open secret in Gandhinagar. Patil has, however, retained Rupani in the parliamentary board, which will finalise election tickets for this year's assembly elections. Keep your enemies closer, as they say.

LORD OF THE FILES

M.K. Stalin waited an eternity to become Tamil Nadu chief minister. He won't be waiting as long for the verdict on his leadership. His first report card after eight months in office lists 2,619 out of 2,683 files cleared and government orders issued for 1,238 of 1,641 announcements. Stalin isn't stalling.

R SENTHIL KUMAR/PTI

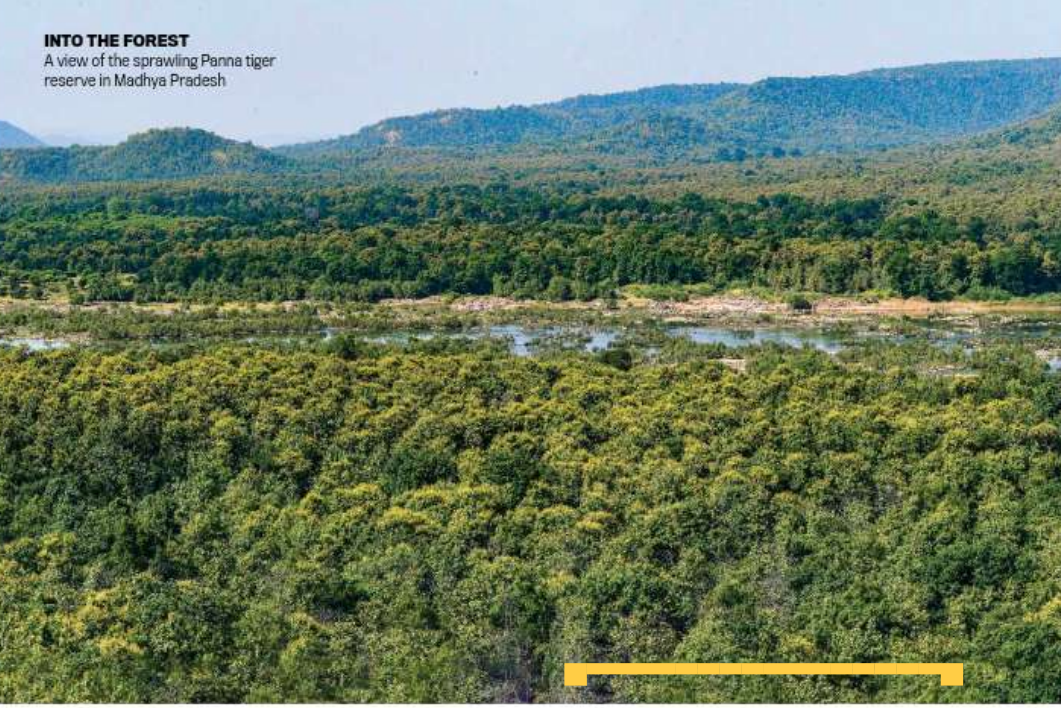
RANE vs RANE

The family of India's longest serving MLA **Pratapsingh Rane**, 83, is split down the middle for the upcoming Goa assembly election. Rane is in the Congress and his son Vishwajeet is with the BJP. The BJP has nominated Vishwajeet in Valpoi, while his wife Divya will contest from Poriem. There she will likely go head-to-head with Rane's wife and her mother-in-law Vijayadevi. A not-so-classic *saas-bahu* tussle.

Reel Life Hero

I&B minister **Anurag Thakur** is hoping that resuscitating ghosts of films past will help him earn some electoral karma too. Come 2024 and 5,000 films and documentaries at the National Film Archives of India in Pune, that KPMG has been tasked with to restore and digitise, will be moved to a new building. The project was first launched in 2017 but was never completed. In 2019, it was taken forward under Prakash Javadekar, but later abandoned. Now, Thakur has infused Rs 600 crore into the endeavour and is making it his showcase project. Third time's the charm?

–Sandeep Unnithan with Romita Datta, Amarnath K. Menon and Kiran D. Tare



INTO THE FOREST
A view of the sprawling Panna tiger reserve in Madhya Pradesh

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ISFR 2021

FOREST COVER-UP

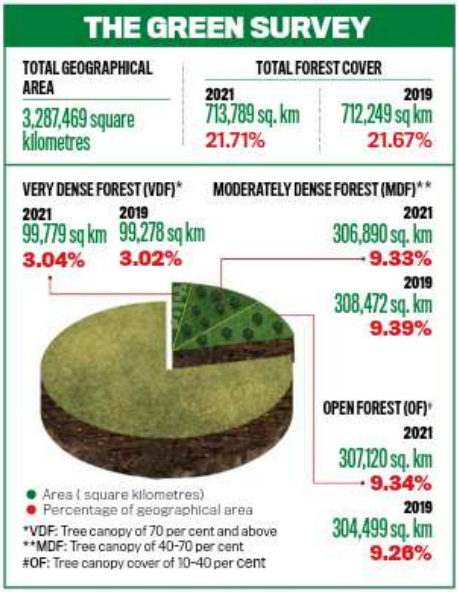
By Rahul Noronha

In a country where the environment versus development debate plays on loop, the biennial India State of Forest Report (ISFR) 2021, released by the Union minister for environment, forests and climate change Bhupendra Yadav on January 13, should have been cause for much cheer. Going by its content, India has increased its forest cover by 1,340 sq. km over the previous assessment in 2019. "The focus of the Narendra Modi government is not just to conserve the forests quantitatively but to enrich them qualitatively," said an upbeat Yadav, while releasing the report.

But look between the covers of the report, the 17th edition of the exercise, and you find some deft green jugglery. Broadly, India's forest and tree cover is 809,000 sq. km or 24.62 per cent of the country's geographical area. A third of the net 1,540 sq. km increase in forest cover comes from a 501 sq. km addition to the very dense forests (VDF) or the best 'quality' forests even as the moderately dense forests (MDF) sees a decline of 1,582 sq. km and the open forests (OF) boast an addition of 2,621 sq. kms over the past two years. The report includes, for the first time, the status of forests in tiger reserves, tiger corridors and lion conservation areas.

In addition, the increase in the OF category is courtesy plantations of fast-growing tree varieties. And monoculture-based plantations (growing a single variety of vegetation) are not exactly the best replacement for biologically diverse natural forests, say experts. "Monocultures lead to site degradation, reduction in moisture content and drop in seed production," says Ravindra N. Saxena, former principal chief conservator of forests, Madhya Pradesh. But he does concede that at least plantations are adding to the tree cover and that "something is better than nothing". Dr Madhu Verma, chief economist, World Resources Institute, though, finds it difficult to ignore the environmental cost of monoculture plantations. "Such plantations lead to loss of resilience in forests, which manifests as trees becoming more susceptible to climate change, diseases and even forest fires. So, while

BANDEEP SINGH



Source: India State of Forest Report 2019 & 2021

Graphic by ASIT ROY

industrialisation may lead to an increase in GDP and plantations to a hike in forest cover, their environmental cost should be factored in," she says.

The decline in MDF can be attributed partly due to populations living alongside, converting the areas to open forests, and partly to loss to development projects. Data from the ministry of environment, forests and climate change reveals that nearly 830 sq. km of forest land was diverted to non-forestry use between 2016 and 2021.

As many as 17 states and Union territories have more than a third of their geographical area under forest cover. The northeastern states have the highest forest cover as a percentage of their total area. While Andhra Pradesh, Telangana and Odisha recorded an increase in forest cover, 11 other states, including Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Mizoram, Nagaland, Meghalaya, Delhi, Punjab, Sikkim, Tripura and West Bengal, reported a decline in forest cover over the previous assessment.

Considering the modest gains, will India be able to honour its commitment to expand forest cover to a third of its area, as enshrined in the National Forest Policy, 1988? Yes, but again with the expedient of amending the Forest Conservation Act, 1980, to incentivise plantations on private lands and thereby attain policy objectives.

As Kanchi Kohli, senior researcher at the Centre for Policy Research, New Delhi, points out in a critique of the 2021 report, "The ISFR exercise is directed at counting forest cover and not assessing the quality of forests. It is not a surprise that the methodology is routinely adapted to show that we are nearing the national forest policy targets or India's climate adaptation targets. This is the case with ISFR 2021 too."

Another clever inclusion in the latest ISFR 2021 is the forest cover in tiger reserves and corridors, and lion conservation areas. India has 52 tiger reserves, occupying a total area of 74,710 sq. km, of which 74.51 per cent (55,666 sq. km) is forest cover. Of these, 20 have recorded a gain and 32 contributed to a net decline of 22.62 sq. km of forest cover in the past decade. The decline in forest cover in these tiger reserves is surprising, since they enjoy the highest degree of protection under law and have the greatest number of resources deputed for their protection.

While the data helps assess the health of tiger reserves, how accurately it depicts net increase in forest cover is debatable. Ecological dishonesty is unlikely to do the cause any good. ■

BHUPENDRA YADAV
Union environment minister

"THE MODI GOVT.'S FOCUS IS TO CONSERVE FORESTS NOT JUST QUANTITATIVELY BUT ALSO QUALITATIVELY"

NAROTTAM MISHRA

GUARDIAN OF OFFENDED SENSIBILITIES

By Rahul Noronha

PANKAJ TIWARI

He may be the home minister of Madhya Pradesh, but that does not stop 61-year-old Narottam Mishra from taking up issues that could hurt 'Hindu sensibilities' anywhere in the country. With a standing of 30 years in state politics, Mishra has succeeded in compelling 'offenders' to back down, earning a cult following in the bargain. He is placing himself as a principal challenger to Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan, and many see his zeal as nothing more than an attempt to reinvent himself politically.

Amazon is only the latest target of the minister's ire. On January 25, Mishra directed the Madhya Pradesh director general of police to file an FIR against the e-commerce giant for allegedly selling a shoe with the Indian flag on it. "It has come to my attention that Amazon online platform had been using the national flag to sell its products.... Prima facie it seems to be a matter of violation of the flag code, which is hurtful. Insulting the country will not be tolerated at any cost," he tweeted. This is not even the first time that Mishra has acted against Amazon. In November 2021, a case was registered in Bhind against Amazon officials after it was found that marijuana was being sold on the online platform under the guise of selling stevia.

A little while ago, Mishra had threatened actress Sunny Leone with legal consequences over her latest video appearance for the song, *Madhuban Mein Radhika Nache*. "I am warning Sharib and Toshi (the singers) and Sunny Leone," he said on December 26 in Bhopal. "I am consulting legal experts and if they don't apologise and remove the song in three days, they will face legal consequences." Unwilling to feed the controversy, the producers agreed to change the song's title and lyrics, handing Mishra another victory in his cultural policing endeavours. Last October, it was a Dabur advertisement featuring a lesbian couple that got Mishra riled. Around the same time, members of a right-wing Hindu group vandalised the sets of Prakash Jha's *Aashram 3*, the popular web series that was being shot in Bhopal. The home minister termed the attack unfortunate but also called the rioters "patriotic". Mishra also promised to set up a body under the district collector to vet film scripts before giving them permission to shoot in the state. A few days later, fashion designer Sabyasachi Mukherjee found himself in the crosshairs after the minister deemed a *mangalsutra* ad obscene. Sabyasachi reacted like the others, quietly withdrawing the ad rather than courting controversy.

Political observers in the state attribute Mishra's newfound tendency to air an opinion on everything to his desire to stay in the news and to use the "Yogi [Adityanath] template" of taking a controversial, hardline stand to earn political dividends. While Chouhan's previous cabinets had hardliners, Mishra was not one of them. "Narottam Mishra is trying to carve out a separate political space for himself, distinct from CM Chouhan," says veteran journalist N.K. Singh. "He is no hardliner, but through his reactions on religious

Mishra's relationship with Shivraj Chouhan has been strained in the present term, so much so that his trip to Delhi led to rumours of an imminent CM change

issues, he is taking a calculated risk and also trying to endear himself to the Sangh. One must understand that people in other parties outside the state don't know him. With new controversies, he thinks they will soon enough."

Hailing from a political family, Mishra has always been a "colourful personality". He cut his teeth in student politics in Gwalior and was elected as an MLA from the region's Dabra segment in 1990. He lost the next election in a triangular fight, but was re-elected in 1998. After Dabra was declared a reserved constituency in 2008, Mishra shifted to the Datia seat, from where he has won three elections.

In Bhopal, where he spends his weekdays, Mishra lives in the exclusive hilly locality of Char Imli. Once it was home only to top civil servants, but ministers, MLAs and even journalists also live there now. Mishra goes for a walk in the evening with his boisterous entourage, much to the chagrin of the senior officers' wives, who grumble about the political class and their hangers-on for having 'encroached' on genteel Char Imli—something they can do little about. Otherwise wary of whom he meets, Mishra does have a group of journalists hanging around his house in anticipation of the sound bites he so regularly dispenses. He is also said to be fanatical about his post-lunch siesta, letting nothing come in its way.

Weekends are reserved for his constituency where Mishra is known to be very accessible to voters. He is also among the few MP cabinet ministers who answer their phones personally.

While in the opposition in the 1990s, Mishra very soon attracted attention for his fiery interventions in House proceedings, especially during debates. He was known for his oratory and was first appointed a minister in mid-2003 by Babulal Gaur and retained by Chouhan in his maiden cabinet in November 2005. The two enjoyed a good rapport till the end of Chouhan's first term in 2008. Mishra was always by his side, and was even described as Chouhan's "*sankatmochak* (trouble-shooter)" when the latter came under scrutiny for the 2006 'Dumper Scam' in which he allegedly spent Rs 2 crore on the equipment, a sum disproportionate to the income stated in his poll affidavit. Back then, whenever anyone asked Mishra how he was doing, he would respond with, "*Mai* (the deity at Datia's Peetambara peeth) *aur bhai* (Chouhan), *donon ka aashirwad hai* (I have the blessings of both)." Mishra contested the 2009 Lok Sabha election against Jyotiraditya Scindia in Guna but lost. He continued as minister, heading a host of departments till 2018 when the BJP was voted out of power.

In 2019, the Kamal Nath-led Congress government pursued the e-tendering scam in which the MP State Electronic Development Corporation's e-tendering software was hacked. The Rs 3,000 crore imbroglio led to the arrest of Mishra's personal staff and speculation that he too would soon be behind bars. Unfazed, Mishra was back in government as home minister soon after Madhavrao Scindia and his Congress cohorts switched sides and joined the BJP in March 2020. As expected, the police officer investigating the scam was sent on an obscure posting. Mishra has also been quite ruthless with political rivals in his constituency.

However, Mishra's relationship with Chouhan has been strained this term, so much so that a visit to Delhi on January 2 ignited speculation of an imminent change of CM. Mishra's stature in the current government is clearly higher than he has ever enjoyed as cabinet minister. He has an ADG rank IPS officer in his staff, a privilege that even the CM doesn't have. BJP insiders suggest that Mishra was a serious contender for chief ministership when the party returned to power given his vital behind-the-scenes role in destabilising the Kamal Nath government. But since he was denied the top job, Chouhan was told Mishra would have to be treated better than the average cabinet minister. Mishra used that clout to pull off transfers and postings for his kith and kin but things changed after Chouhan cemented his position following a series of bycelection wins.

Within the BJP, Mishra is said to be close to Union home minister Amit Shah, although how much of it is true and how much a legend of his creation is anyone's guess. Given the party's current preoccupation with OBC (Other Backward Class) politics, Mishra's Brahmin background may well be a disqualification. But the accident of birth does not have to be an impediment to his ambition for the top job. ■

J. DEVIKA

GUEST COLUMN

God's Own Cemetery

To survive Kerala of the early 21st century, you need to be adept at navigating the absurd. Friends from Bengal scoff at me when I say this because they have been there, done it. But no. This is a scene worthy of the Dutch Renaissance master Hieronymus Bosch, whose teeming canvases still confound the modern eye. In this ever-growing ocean of fleshly apparitions—which can, without notice, turn into a vast desert, or intimidating voids that can only be imagined—you will encounter some dark ironies. Communist leaders who are said to sup with those given to natural resource predation on a carnivorous scale. Masses of 'empowered' female bodies swaying synchronously or standing in attention at the Supreme Leader's command—witness the semi-feudal Thiruvathira dances at recent CPI(M) district conferences, and the so-called Women's Wall of 2018! Parties committed to liberal democracy that throw out articulate young women members just because they complained of sexual harassment. Also, men of the cloth who specialise in violating nuns or children, as the allegation goes. And megastars who have actually been charged with having their co-stars raped by hired goons—on video—for their own delectation.

They call it God's Own Country, and that is how it might seem to outsiders. But if your eye is the perceptive eye of the imagination, you will see what it is like for insiders: something like Bosch's *Garden of Earthly Delights*—people nearly drowned in a crazy cesspool with a life of its own, periodically stirred by the sneezes of a giant ogre looming over it.

I say 'insiders' deliberately—there are no citizens anymore. Insiders are prey. Judge by the behaviour of the Kerala police. Those who seek protection won't get it—the shadow of Hindutva stormtroopers, or of the Church, falls on them directly. Instead, the police turns on the very human bodies it's supposed to secure. An indigent senior couple already grieving the murder of their 14-year-old daughter had torture in store for them. An eight-year-old girl was given a summary 'public trial' by a Pink Patrol woman cop (the theft charge later turned out to be false). The only one who received a measure of justice is a Swedish tourist accosted around New Year's Eve for possessing two bottles of liquor from the government's alcoholic beverages outlet and not keeping the bill. Outsiders are citizens.

Judge also by the judges. One of them has managed to get his name right into the international press with a bishop's acquittal. The victim, a nun, was deemed less than a "stellar witness" for not being graphic enough. If actors commission rapes for videographic evidence, our judicial system seems to demand near-photographic precision from victim testimonies...almost saying, a la mode, "Pics, or it didn't happen."

Amid intense social change in Kerala, seeds of renewal are sprouting in the form of young women speaking truth to power

As a historian, I have a feeling this is how intense social change might feel at any time, when institutions past their time fight tooth and nail to keep their place. This is how it must have felt in the early 19th century or the early 20th century too. Almost every single institution that emerged out of the last century—the new 'arranged' marriage, the nuclear family committed to child-crafting, the modern caste/ community organisations and modernised religious communities, political parties engaged in community competition for resources, the social development-oriented state—has turned monstrous. But the seeds of renewal are sprouting too. In the form of young women whose struggles have dented all these institutions—Hadiya, who braved family, community, state and Hindutva bullies for her choice of faith and partner; Anupama Chandran, who took on the full might of the CPI(M) to retrieve her baby, kidnapped by her party leader-father in order to protect his 'honour'; Deepa Mohanan, the Dalit scholar who brought the Mahatma Gandhi University to its knees; the brave sorority from the Muslim League women's wing who openly condemned sexual harassers in their party. Maybe the 21st century equivalent of Sree Narayana Guru is born somewhere. Maybe they are womxn or queer. I am hopeful. ■

J. Devika, *historian and social critic, teaches at the Centre for Development Studies, Thiruvananthapuram*

Illustration by SIDDHANT JUMDE

आज तक

देश का नं. 1 हिंदी न्यूज़ ऐप

जुड़े रहिए हर खबर से,
कहीं भी, कभी भी

अभी डाउनलोड करें
aajtak.in/app

उपलब्ध है

CAN YOGI MAKE HISTORY?

Yogi Adityanath is poised on the edge of a future that can change Indian politics. He brims with optimism, but a resurgent Akhilesh Yadav is giving him the battle of his life in UP

BY **RAJ CHENGAPPA** *WITH* **PRASHANT SRIVASTAVA IN LUCKNOW** *Photograph by* **BANDEEP SINGH**

Yogi Adityanath, the ochre-robed, shaven-headed monk-turned-politician, faces the biggest ever test of his life—but seems unfazed by the magnitude of the challenge. For five years, as chief minister of Uttar Pradesh, he has ruled India's most populous state with an iron fist sheathed in a saffron glove that was never far from controversy. Now the moment of reckoning has come, with 152 million voters about to decide whether to give him a second term or usher in a new dispensation. At his official residence in Lucknow, seated on a sofa draped with a saffron towel, flanked by a bronze statue of Lord Ram with a bow and arrow and a *pichhwai* of Lord Krishna, Adityanath makes for a picture brimming with optimism. "I've never lost and never accepted defeat," he says.

GREAT SAFFRON HOPE
Uttar Pradesh chief minister Yogi Adityanath

CONTENDER-IN-CHIEF Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav at a press conference in Lucknow on January 22

Photograph by **BANDEEP SINGH**

That's a fact. He has won five consecutive elections to the Gorakhpur Lok Sabha seat. This time, it's a battle of somewhat different contours, though. And the stakes are incredibly high for both the 49-year-old Adityanath and the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). The election to the UP assembly is like the very axis on which Indian democracy spins. And Adityanath will create history of sorts if he is re-elected—no UP chief minister before him has ever won a second consecutive term after completing a full first tenure. (N.D. Tiwari did win two consecutive terms in 1985, but his first term lasted only seven months, and his second, six.) If he pulls off that feat, it will put the stamp of popular approval on Adityanath's leadership and position him ahead of most others in the BJP as the party's prime ministerial aspirant to succeed Narendra Modi.

For the BJP, a big win in UP will give it a major impetus to win a third consecutive parliamentary election in 2024. In the short term, it will enable the party to dictate who will become the next President when polls are held in July. (UP, with its 403 assembly seats, 100 legislative council members, 80 Lok Sabha members and 31 Rajya Sabha members, contributes the maximum votes to the electoral college). In the longer term, a decisive mandate in UP will also be a huge endorsement for Hindutva. That may embolden the Sangh Parivar in the way it crafts its ideological journey across the country in future.

THE FIVE YEARS AKHILESH SPENT IN THE OPPOSITION AFTER HIS PARTY WAS TROUNCED BY THE BJP IN 2017 SAW HIM MATURE INTO A WISER, CANNIER POLITICIAN—ENTIRELY HIS OWN BOSS

In Lucknow, a sense of the moment grips the BJP state headquarters. The innocuous-looking renovated PWD bungalow with tinted glass windows, which pales in comparison to the elegant colonial façade of Vidhan Bhavan next door, betrays no signs of its importance in architectural terms. But the way it came to life late last week, as Adityanath drove in with an entourage of white Toyota Fortuners, no one could doubt that it was the very cradle of possible futures. A crush of party workers hailed Adityanath with the party's new slogan: *'Soch Imaandar, Kaam Damdaar* (Honest in Thought, Powerful in Action)'. Inside a conference room packed to the brim with media, he along with other state and central leaders released the four-minute campaign theme song titled *'UP Phir Maange BJP Sarkar* (UP wants a BJP

regime again)'. Expectedly, it highlighted the new touch of grandeur and scale at the Hindu pilgrimage sites in Ayodhya, Varanasi, Prayagraj and Mathura, besides a host of welfare measures and development projects that the Adityanath government initiated or executed.

IMPORTANTLY, IN SEVERAL SCENES in the campaign video, Adityanath appears along with the prime minister. This includes the now-famous photo of Modi placing his hand paternally on Adityanath's shoulder, signaling his full backing for the CM to silence his doubters. After the song played out, state BJP president Swatantra Dev Singh waxed eloquent about the state government's achievements—the phrase "Yogi Sarkar" was a conspicuous leitmotif. All the signs pointed to just how important Adityanath had become to the party's poll campaign, along with Modi and Amit Shah—the architects of the BJP's landslide win here in 2017.

That is a remarkable turnaround. Five years ago, when Adityanath emerged as the BJP's surprise choice for chief minister in India's largest state, many were sceptical about his ability to stay the course. Though he was a five-time MP—indeed, even the youngest of the 12th Lok Sabha at 26 years of age—he had never held a ministerial office either at the Centre or in the state. His managerial experience had been limited to being head of a monastic order that oversaw the famed Shri Gorakhnath Math in Gorakhpur, on the northeastern fringe of UP, bordering Nepal, where the Nathpanthi footprint extends. Adityanath also ran a radical youth outfit called the Hindu Yuva Vahini that aggressively propagated Hindutva and often derided the BJP for plying a softer version of the saffron agenda.

When the BJP won a phenomenal 312 out of the 403 seats in the 2017 state assembly election and returned

BATTLE STRATEGIES

BJP

Yogi Adityanath

STRENGTHS

- A strong CM candidate with assured support from traditional Hindutva voters
- The BJP's organisational skill—booth-level microplanning—and its strong IT cell. Implementation of welfare schemes for the poor

CHALLENGES

- Soaring inflation, unemployment and the perception of being 'anti-Brahmin'. The fallout of the farmers' agitation
- The challenge of winning non-Yadav OBC voters

ALLIANCE PARTNERS

- **Apna Dal (S):** Led by central minister Anupriya Patel, strong in east UP. Its focus is on Kurmi OBC voters—the second-most influential OBC caste in the state after the Yadavs
- **Nishad Party:** Led by Dr Sanjay Nishad, it focuses on Nishad and Mallah voters, who have a presence in Prayagraj, Varanasi and Jaunpur, among other areas

SP

Akhilesh Yadav

STRENGTHS

- Vote banks among Yadavs and Muslims and is wooing Brahmin and Dalit voters. Has alliances with non-Yadav OBCs
- Image of a youthful and energetic leader with a history of development work

CHALLENGES

- No star campaigner besides Akhilesh. There are also internal political feuds
- The BSP, Congress and AIMIM might split the minority vote

ALLIANCE PARTNERS

- **RLD:** Led by Jayant Chaudhary, focuses on Jats. Will play a role in west UP
- **Suheldev Bhartiya Samaj:** An MBC party, led by Om Prakash Rajbhar, based in east UP
- **Pragatisheel Samaj (L):** Led by Akhilesh's uncle Shivpal, unites Yadav clan
- **Others:** Mahan Dal, the Janwadi Party (Socialist) and the Apna Dal (Krishna Patel)

BSP

Mayawati

STRENGTHS

- Personal mass appeal and a solid vote bank. Having been chief minister four times, she also has a lot of experience in managing a state

CHALLENGES

- Other parties are also wooing the BSP's vote bank: Dalits. The party is missing on the ground, and has also lost more than half its MLAs

ALLIANCE PARTNERS

None announced

INC

Priyanka Gandhi

STRENGTHS

- Personal mass appeal, with a strong presence on social media. Trying to build a new vote bank by giving 40 per cent of tickets to women

CHALLENGES

- The party has performed poorly in recent years, and has no fixed voter base to fall back on. Several senior leaders have also departed recently

ALLIANCE PARTNERS

None announced

to power after a hiatus of 15 years, Adityanath was not in the reckoning for the top post. The experienced Manoj Sinha, then a Union minister of state, and Keshav Prasad Maurya, state BJP president, were the front-runners. How Adityanath was chosen remains a matter of speculation, but it is widely believed that Prime Minister Modi and then BJP president Shah, in consultation with the top brass of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), decided that Adityanath had the grit to handle what is arguably one of India's most difficult states to govern. To pacify the other aspirants, two of them were made deputy chief ministers and a clutch of others, ministers. The Opposition mocked the BJP government for having 10 and a half chief ministers—Adityanath being the half.

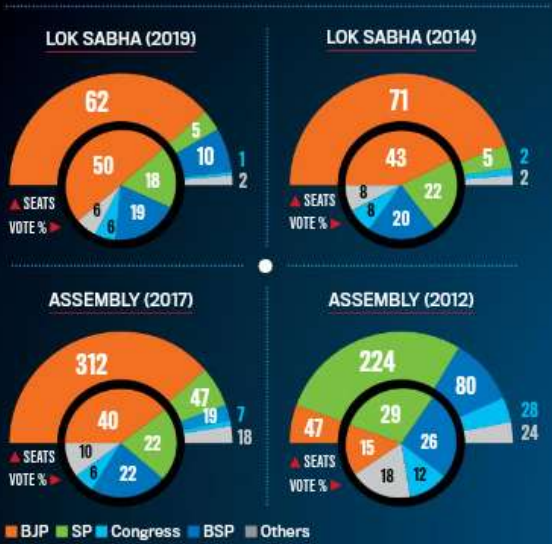
INITIALLY, ADITYANATH RODE the Hindutva chariot unabashedly, in a spell of his rule that critics termed "tyrannical". He declared war on 'love jihad' and even had an ordinance passed prohibiting religious conversion in the name of love. He also formed 'anti-Romeo squads', ostensibly for the safety of women although, all too often, they ended up intimidating genuinely courting couples. He gave the state police a free hand to gun down criminals, if need be, which soon led to charges of encounter killings. He clamped down on cow smuggling and slaughter and set up *gaushalas* (cow protection homes) across UP at a huge cost. And to the dismay of babudom, in a state where speaking with a mouthful of paan is an art as is spitting its juice out edgewise, he banned the use of tobacco and gutka and chewing paan in government offices.

A major electoral setback on his home turf Gorakhpur in his first year saw him settle down to the serious business of governing a state that would rank as the world's fifth most populous country were it an independent nation. Adityanath was advised to focus more on the welfare and development of the state for, as one aide put it, "His *bhagwa* (saffron) credentials were a given and wouldn't get him more votes." Adityanath believes he has done a good job of his tenure as CM (*see inter-*

Graphics by TANMOY CHAKRABORTY

THE PAST RECORD

Since 2014, the BJP has won at least 40 per cent of the vote in major elections in Uttar Pradesh (to the Lok Sabha/ Vidhan Sabha), making it the dominant party



Note: The SP fought the 2017 assembly poll in alliance with the Congress; for the 2019 Lok Sabha polls, it was in alliance with the BSP

POLITICAL WAVE

The polls will be conducted over seven days between February 10 and March 7, in a wave from west to east UP

PHASE	DATE	SEATS
I	Feb. 10	58
II	Feb. 14	55
III	Feb. 20	59
IV	Feb. 23	59
V	Feb. 27	61
VI	Mar. 3	57
VII	Mar. 7	54

UP's CASTE BREAKUP (%)

UPPER CASTES
Brahmins: **9-10%**
Thakurs: **5-6%**
Kayasthas: **2%**
Vaishya/ Baniya: **2%**
Others: **2%**

OBCs
Yadavs **9%**
Non-Yadavs (Kurmis **6-7%**, Jats **4-5%**, Lodhs **3%**)

MBCs/ EBCs*
Mauryas: **4%**, Kushwaha/ Shakya, Kahar/ Kashyap: **3%**, Kewat/ Mallah/ Nishad: **3%**, Kumhar/ Prajapati: **2%**, Nonia-Chauhan: **2%**, Bind, Biyar, Rajbhar: **3%** Others: **3%**, Total MBCs/ EBCs): 20% (approx.)

DALITS
Jatavs: 11-12%
Non-Jatavs: 8-9%

Sources: Election Commission of India; India Today-MyAxis post-poll survey

**MBC/ EBC: Most backward class/ economically backward class*

44%

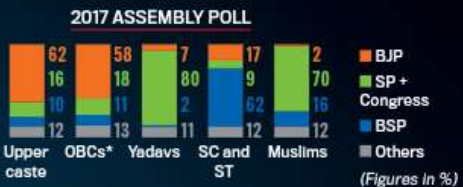
THE SHARE OF UPPER-CASTE MLAs IN THE STATE ASSEMBLY, UP FROM **32%** IN 2012

6%

THE SHARE OF MUSLIM MLAs IN THE 2017 ASSEMBLY, THE LOWEST SINCE 1991

HOW CASTES CAST THEIR VOTES

The BJP's dominance among upper-caste voters continues, and it is making inroads into OBC and Dalit vote banks too



MINORITY REPORT

Party vote shares in 59 Muslim-dominated assembly constituencies

(Figures in %)

https://t.me/Digital_eLibrary

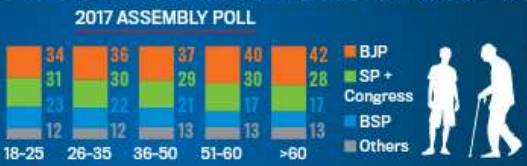
THE DALIT CARD

Party vote shares in 85 constituencies reserved for SCs in the state

(Figures in %)

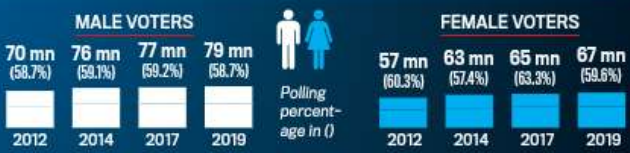
AGE NO BAR

The BJP did well among voters of all age groups in 2017 and 2019



WHY WOMEN VOTERS MATTER

Voter turnout is often higher among women than men. There was also a 17 per cent increase in female voters from 2012-19, compared with a 13 per cent increase in male voters in the same period



THE GENDER GAP

The share of female candidates is steadily growing. The share of women winners is growing faster

THE BACKBONE

In the 2019 Lok Sabha poll, the BJP's highest share of support was among housewives

*Professionals: Doctor/ advocate/ engineer/ CA; #Small shop owners: Tea stall/ paan shop/ salon/ dhaba/ hawkers/ vegetable and fruit seller; *Skilled professionals: Electrician/ plumber/ guide/ pandit/ technician/ carpenter/ auto driver/ driver*

view)—the voters' verdict will be known on March 10.

There's room for suspense there. A few months ago, the BJP may have been justified in believing it had the UP 2022 poll firmly sewed up. After all, it had all the heavy artillery—a formidable party infrastructure, a purpose-filled government that was now skilfully bilingual in the languages of identity as well as development, and a triumvirate of charismatic Hindutva mascots. But the churn of heartland politics can hold surprises. For, not far from Adityanath's official residence, his predecessor and arch rival Akhilesh Yadav, the youthful Samajwadi Party (SP) chief, has plotted a determined comeback.

IF THE COUNT OF VEHICLES flocking the SP's sprawling headquarters (it even has an amphitheatre) are any indication of voting intentions, you could be pardoned for thinking the SP is winning hands down! It may just be the thrum of a more earthy politics though. As a political observer explains, unlike the BJP, which has a disciplined cadre and party structure, SP supporters are often uncontrollable and the party apparatus disorganised. Especially because Akhilesh is virtually a one-man army and every ticket-seeker, with his comet's tail of flunkies, makes it a point to seek "netaji's" blessings.

The five years Akhilesh spent on the Opposition benches after his party was trounced by the BJP in 2017 saw him mature into a wiser, cannier politician—though one who still retains his youthful mien and exuberance. Wearing his party's signature red cap, the 48-year-old Akhilesh told INDIA TODAY, "In the last five years, I realised that one should stay focused on the development vision. The BJP is only cutting ribbons of the projects we started in my tenure as chief minister." Before the Election Commission clamped down on campaign rallies because of the Covid threat, Akhilesh had set out on a series of yatras across the state, focusing on the failures of the 'Yogi Sarkar' and drawing large crowds. When he chanted his favourite campaign slogan, "2022 *mein badlav hoga. Janta ne mann bana liya hai, is sarkar ko ukhaad phenkne ka* (2022 will bring change, the people are determined to throw this government out)," the crowd would roar back, "*Sarkar ko ukhaad phenkne ka*."

Then, in the last fortnight, Akhilesh shook the ruling BJP when he got two prominent members of Adityanath's cabinet, Swami Prasad Maurya and Dara Singh Chauhan, and a minister of state, Dharam Singh Saini, to resign from their posts and join the SP. All three belonged to UP's vast cartography of backward classes—tending to the Extreme Backward Class (EBC) part of the spectrum—and came out complaining that the BJP had neglected their community interests and that Adityanath had taken decisions involving their ministries without consulting them. In winning them over to his side, Akhilesh had taken a leaf out of the BJP's UP playbook of 2017 and used it against them. Prior to 2017, the BJP, seen as predominantly a party of the upper castes, had gone about aggressively wooing the larger backward class constituency, building a narrative that Akhilesh as CM had

MAYAWATI HAD LINKED UP DALITS, MUSLIMS AND BRAHMINS TO WIN A MAJORITY IN 2007. THAT ALLIANCE HAS MOSTLY ERODED, BUT ADHERENTS FEEL SHE WILL STILL BE THE KINGMAKER AFTER MARCH 10

ANI

THE CASTE WARRIORS Former minister Swami Prasad Maurya, Dharam Singh Saini and other MLAs joining the SP (right); BSP chief Mayawati at a press conference in Lucknow, announcing a candidate list for the election

ANI

promoted his Yadav community to the exclusion and detriment of non-Yadav OBCs and EBCs. That worked. In 2017, the BJP won 58 per cent of the total non-Yadav OBC votes, besides an inflow of Dalits who previously owed allegiance to Mayawati's Bahujan Samaj Party.

This time Akhilesh, an engineering graduate, is assembling his own coalition engine. A set of cannily plotted alliances, he hopes, will turbocharge his campaign and put him in pole position. He has with him the Rashtriya Lok Dal (RLD), which has a large following in the Jat community, the Suheldev Bharatiya Samaj Party (SBSP) of the Rajbhar community, an influential OBC group in eastern UP, and three other smaller parties that have pockets of influence among OBCs and scheduled castes (*see graphic*). SBSP leader Om Prakash Rajbhar, a former minister in the Yogi cabinet who had been ousted in 2019, says: "The BJP has cheated us and now our SP alliance is going to defeat the party. Mark my words, Yogi is going back to Gorakhpur, with the voters chanting '*Chal Sanyasi Mandir Mein*' on March 10." Akhilesh has also patched up with his *chacha* Shivpal Yadav; the younger brother of his father and SP patriarch Mulayam Yadav had split and formed his own party, the Pragatisheel Samaj Party (Lohia) or PSPL. Most importantly, unlike the situation that prevailed during his tenure as CM, Akhilesh has unified the SP under him and demonstrated that now he is his own boss.

THERE IS A METHOD

to Akhilesh's reverse-engineering of the BJP strategy that had toppled him in 2017. His own Yadav community forms only some 25-30 per cent of the total OBC vote (the latter is estimated at about 40 per cent of the overall electorate)—the rest come from other castes, many much more deprived. By winning over prominent OBC faces from the BJP and forming alliances with both MBCs and EBCs, he is building the narrative that, overall, the backwards lost out when they allied with the BJP. In doing so, Akhilesh hopes to push his votes from the various OBC communities to around 20-25 per cent. This is over and above his pursuit of anti-incumbency votes with a general (and trenchant) critique of the Adityanath government for non-performance on development, unemployment and price rise.

With Mayawati seemingly dormant in this election, he also hopes to wean away some of the non-Jatav scheduled caste communities from the BSP umbrella. (The Dalits overall account for 20 per cent votes in UP). While Mayawati had successfully cobbled a combination of Dalits, Muslims and Brahmins to win a majority in 2007, that alliance now stands considerably eroded. Ten of the BSP's 17 MLAs, belonging largely to non-Dalit communities, have defected to the Samajwadi camp. BSP spokesperson Faizan Khan, however, argues that Behenji has been working silently to retain her vote base and believes that, come March 10, she will be playing kingmaker.

Akhilesh, meanwhile, is also expecting the 20 per cent Muslim votes to

back him as he is seen as the best bet to win against the BJP. In rearranging the landscape thus, he has made the 2022 election a bipolar contest between the SP and the BJP rather than a multi-cornered fight involving the BSP and Congress as well. If he can reach the 40 per cent mark in terms of total votes, it could lead him to victory. In 2017, the BJP's landslide win came by virtue of a cumulative vote share of 39.67 per cent. Akhilesh's strategy is to chip away methodically at that and stack up his own Lego blocks high enough to bring power within reach.

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THE BJP JUGGERNAUT, however, is not sitting idle and watching Akhilesh puncture its wheels. The Empire struck right back with a series of moves designed to stop him in his tracks. They exposed the fragile unity of the Yadav parivar by winning over Aparna, wife of Akhilesh's stepbrother Pratik Yadav, allowing Keshav Prasad Maurya, the state's deputy chief minister, to comment, "If he can't keep his parivar together, how can he run this large state unitedly?" They also sealed their alliances with a dominant faction of the Apna Dal, representing the Kurmi community, who form the second largest chunk of OBC votes after the Yadavs, and the Nishad Party, which commands a sizeable following among the EBC fisherfolk community in the riverine belts of the east. Anupriya Patel, Union minister and Apna Dal (S) president, says: "The SP was late in wooing the non-Yadav OBCs. We are in tune with the BJP, having contested together in earlier elections." The BJP then dented the Congress by luring R.P.N. Singh, a former confidant of the Gandhis, now repackaged as an OBC face. Shah also called a meeting of prominent Jats in an urgent bid to assuage the community and weaken the SP-RLD alliance.

The BJP has multiple other stratagems to fall back on. Its trump card remains Modi and the idea of the "double-engine sarkar", referring to the virtuous synergy that comes about by having the same party ruling both the Centre and the state. To counter the economic devastation caused by the pandemic, even if belatedly, the state government supplemented central sops with its own free food rations for the poor. Also, Adityanath claims he has vigorously implemented the various central schemes relating to housing and sanitation for the poor, besides free gas connections and loan waivers for farmers. Says Badri Narayan, a social historian and professor at the G.B. Pant Social Science Institute in Prayagraj, "The *labharthis* (beneficiaries) have become an important vote bank for the BJP as they have reached out to the poorest of the poor through their schemes." On the development front, Adityanath talks of the massive infrastructure his government is building, including six new expressways and nine airports, and catalysing industrial growth by attracting investment worth over Rs 4 lakh crore, with many of the projects into production already. He says the unemployment rate has dropped to 5 per cent annually while it once averaged 14 to 16 per cent.

IF THE CASTE COMBINATIONS AKHILESH HAS PUT TOGETHER START SHOWING RESULTS, THE BJP IS LIKELY TO GO HEAVIER ON POLARISATION TO CONSOLIDATE THE HINDU VOTE

While such claims are difficult to verify, particularly after the pandemic, central government statistics show that while per capita GDP at current prices increased by an average of 7.8 per cent annually in the final three years of Akhilesh's rule, the growth slowed to 5.2 per cent during the first three years of Adityanath's tenure, even before Covid struck. (UP's per capita income of Rs 73,792 is well below the all-India average of Rs

HOME RUN Union home minister Amit Shah on a door to door campaign in Kairana

99,694). Similarly, GSDP growth at current prices averaged 9.1 per cent in the last three years of Akhilesh's tenure, while it was only 6.4 per cent during the first three years of Adityanath's rule. To be fair, though, lower economic growth in the three years before the pandemic was a national phenomenon, not something confined to Uttar Pradesh alone.

While his economic performance presents a mixed bag due to the impact of Covid, it is Adityanath's strongarm tactics on law and order and the impression that he has brought a modicum of control over the various mafia gangs that ruled the state that are likely to get the party votes. This contrasts with the SP government's tenure that was tainted by the impression that the mafias operated freely under patronage and that corruption was rampant. The latter may be an omnipresent virus in India, but Adityanath, like Modi, is teflon-coated on this front. So far, he faces no charges of corruption, and the ascetic robes contribute to a sense of personal purity. He has also come down with a heavy hand on rioters and criminals. The policy of seizing the property of those "destroying state property" may sometimes have been seen as prone to excessive use, even if routed through the courts. But overall it worked, and traders especially breathed easy. Some of the sheen on this front was lost after the 2021 Lakhimpur Kheri incident where four farmers were allegedly mowed down by a convoy of vehicles led by a Union minister's son, especially after action against him was delayed. The 2020 Hathras incident, in which a 19-year-old Dalit woman was gangraped by four dominant caste men, and later died, saw the state machinery being widely condemned for forcibly cremating her body. It remains a blotch, though Adityanath subsequently ordered a CBI inquiry into the case.

TO HIS CREDIT, ADITYANATH HAD clamped down on corruption and put his foot down on not allowing partymen to curry favours or get prized contracts. While the public lauded him for his probity, many of his own MLAs regarded him as inaccessible, arrogant and over-reliant on bureaucrats for delivery. With 44 per cent of the BJP legislators belonging to dominant castes, Adityanath, a Thakur, was accused of favouring his clansmen over Brahmins, a charge Adityanath has repeatedly denied.

A major factor that gives Adityanath and the BJP an upper hand is the strength of its organisational structure. Along with RSS support, the party has mastered the science of electioneering and built a formidable organisational machinery that has focused on grassroots management. Sunil Bansal, the BJP's astute organisational secretary who had worked under Shah to ensure the 2017 victory, is still guiding seat selection as well as campaign activity on the ground. Maurya, who was state president in 2017, says, "Our election machine has been considerably refined and improved since then. We have the tridev system at booths: the *adhyaksh*, a *prabhari* and a booth samiti. In every samiti, we have a panna pramukh who keeps an eye on 60 voters and goes to their houses and requests them to vote for us. That enables us to get our messages across to every household." The BJP also has what is its cultural trump card—the under-construction Ayodhya temple and the recently completed Kashi Vishwanath temple corridor. The power of Hindutva symbolism to earn goodwill among voters can never be discounted.

If the caste combinations Akhilesh has put together start showing results, the BJP is likely to go heavier on polarisation to consolidate the Hindu vote. Shah beginning his door-to-door campaign from Kairana, which saw communal riots break out during Akhilesh's tenure, is one signal. The other is Adityanath's "80:20" leitmotif which, despite his denials, is a clear call to religious consolidation. Akhilesh has been careful not to play into the BJP hands by overtly supporting the Muslim community. He says, "I don't think polarisation is going to happen because people are fed up with unemployment and inflation. They want an alternative. If we form the government in 2022, I will work at double the speed and that will triple the economy." Adityanath too ultimately backs everything with an economic promise. He promises to turn UP into a trillion-dollar economy (it currently stands at Rs 17.4 lakh crore and will have to grow by four times to achieve that status) in his second term, which he says will double the per capita income of its people. His message to Akhilesh: "Be prepared to face a decimating defeat on March 10." But if things don't go as planned for the BJP, he needs to be prepared too—for a return to mahanthood. ■

"I've never lost nor ever accepted defeat"

In a freewheeling chat at his Lucknow residence, Uttar Pradesh chief minister **Yogi Adityanath** spoke to Group Editorial Director **Raj Chengappa** and Special Correspondent **Prashant Srivastava** on his re-election prospects. Excerpts from an exclusive interview

Q. You have been chief minister for five years. Why should people vote for you again?

Whatever we—that is the Bharatiya Janata Party—promised, we delivered. Secondly, the benefits of a double-engine government have come as a double dose for the state, whether of vaccine or of food grains, of saving lives and livelihood or of ensuring safety and prosperity. Only the BJP can ensure it, and all this has been achieved under the leadership of [Prime Minister Narendra] Modiji. Voices coming out of village after village indicate that the BJP will form the government again on March 10, 2022 with a thumping majority.

Q. What makes you so confident?

Uttar Pradesh has better law and order. There have been no riots in the past five years, stringent government action has been taken against mafias that once controlled the government, we have made strict *bandobust* for the safety of our daughters, investment and employment opportunities have been enhanced, and infrastructure development undertaken. In the past 70 years—from 1947 to 2017—only one and a half expressways had been constructed in the state while we are

Photographs by BANDEEP SINGH

working on six currently. [As regards] airport connectivity, when we came to power, UP had only two functional airports—Lucknow and Varanasi; Gorakhpur would see an occasional flight. Today, UP has nine functional airports. Asia's biggest airport is being built at Jewar. Another airport is being constructed at Ayodhya.

Q. What about welfare schemes for the poor?

Regarding welfare schemes for the poor, in the five years before 2017, Akhilesh Yadav had only sanctioned 18,000 houses and not handed over even a single one. Our government has given a house each to 43 lakh poor families. We have made a toilet available to each of the 2.61 crore poor families in the state. When we came to power in 2017, 1,21,000 hamlets had never seen electricity, we began electrification works there and then gave free connections to 1.47 crore families. We provided free LPG connections to 1.56 crore families. When we came to power, people were dying of hunger in the state. Today, we are playing a leading role in terms of the Public Distribution System. Fifteen crore people are getting free ration. The farmer was dying of suicide before 2017. We came to power, waived farmers' loans. The SP-BSP ruled for 14 years, and what they couldn't pay cane farmers in this time, we managed to do in five years. Our government has so far paid Rs 1.55 lakh crore worth of cane dues.

"In the past 70 years, only one and a half expressways had been built in the state. We are working on six currently. In 2016, UP had two airports, now there are nine"

Q. But why did farmers descend here in protest?

No farmers came here, there were no demonstrations here. They came here in support of the three farm laws. The Bharatiya Kisan Union initially supported the three farm bills but when the Sanyukta Kisan Morcha was formed and Punjab and Haryana farmers staged a *dharna*, they joined them. Otherwise, they had supported the laws. That is why there was no law and order problem in UP despite the complete anarchy in neighbouring states. Why, the BJP even ended up winning by-elections and Panchayat elections with thumping majorities.

Q. What about the incident in Lakhimpur Kheri...

That was not a farmers' agitation. That was a confrontation between two sides and an unfortunate incident...and the state took all the necessary action as per the law. Now, the Supreme Court is monitoring all the proceedings. An SIT and a judicial commission have been formed to look into the matter. Whatever the state had to do, it did based on the merits of the case and in accordance with the law.

Q. The Congress general secretary in charge of UP, Priyanka Gandhi, has given 40 per cent of seats to women. Why is the BJP not doing the same?

The BJP is giving tickets to applicants on merit. The maximum number of women MLAs and MPs are from the BJP. We do not believe in just giving them tickets but also in ensuring their success and helping them earn respectability. For us, the Mission Shakti programme is linked to respect for women, their safety and self-reliance. It is not a part of the political agenda. It is linked to their honour and empowerment.

Q. A couple of OBC ministers have left your cabinet in the recent past, with one of them alleging that you didn't even allow him to look at files.

If someone has been clever, then it's time to take leave, chapter closed! What I am saying is that the public knows the truth. We had on the very first day decided that we would have zero tolerance towards crime and criminals as well as corruption and the corrupt. Had this policy not informed all our actions, the government would not have been able to face the electorate with this image and enthusiasm. We would not have been able to fulfil our promise of changing the perception of

the state. These things cannot come through dynastic and casteist politics.

Q. Why then does a section of OBC leaders insist that the party pays only lip service to their interests?
I would say our schemes speak for themselves. The 43 lakh houses that have been given have not gone to my relatives, I am a single person. These have been given to the Dalits, backwards and poor in the state. These issues are being raised by those who have had the ground shift beneath their feet and have been completely decimated by the public.

Q. Casteism seems to have made a return in politics. Hindutva is one thing but casteism seems to be becoming a decisive factor in ticket distribution. Isn't the BJP doing it too?
Caste is a factor in winning elections, but the BJP had contested elections on the issues of nationalism, development and good governance and it will continue to do so going forward.

Q. But you have allied with the Apna Dal, Nishad Party etc.
They have been our allies in the past and we will continue to do so out of respect for our past association.

Q. You talked of 80 versus 20 per cent in a recent interview. Is it an attempt to polarise communities?
It does not refer to polarisation. This is about constructive politics—the election will be 80 versus 20. You will see that the BJP will clinch 80 per cent seats; we will have 80 per cent popular support, be it the village, the poor, the farmers, the youth, the women, the intellectual...those who want to move ahead with constructive politics, those who want the state to prosper and be safe, those who are interested in the development of youth, women's safety, and infrastructure development. All such people will vote for the BJP. Those who favour the mafia, endorse goondaism, incite riots and anarchy will vote for the other side.

"It was the BJP that put an end to the triple talaq menace. Are Muslim women not entitled to justice? When we allotted houses, did we check whether the beneficiary was Hindu or Muslim? Everyone benefits equally from all schemes"

Q. Your statement was seen as referring to Muslims...
It was the BJP that put an end to the menace of triple talaq. Are Muslim women not entitled to justice? When we allotted houses, did we check whether the beneficiary was Hindu or Muslim? Everyone benefits equally from all schemes.

Q. But Muslims comprise 20 per cent of the population. How many tickets will you give them?
We have not talked about caste or votebank at all. For us, a person's merit will lie in his or her winning potential, regardless of caste, region or community. Whoever applies for a ticket will

be assessed on merit. If they exhibit winning potential, then they will be given tickets. Elections, ultimately, are fought to be won. They are not a mere formality to go through.

Q. People say that the law and order situation in the state has improved under your watch. What is the Yogi Model of law and order?
The Yogi Model is one that does not hesitate to display pictures of trouble-makers in public squares, one that decrees that if you burn public property, then you will make good the loss too; one that ensures that if you hassle innocent people, then the police will chase you down; one that ensures your empire will be bulldozed if you have encroached upon public property, the property of the poor or of businessmen.

Q. Does it include giving the police a 'free hand' to gun down criminals if needed?
To establish 'good governance', we have given freedom to the administrative machinery in the state. They have been given an opportunity to work freely under the law without any political intervention. And it is the main reason for our success in the state. The National Crime Records Bureau data will tell you the story, it is all online.

Q. But this is being attributed to non-reporting of crimes in UP, of cases not being registered.
That doesn't happen anymore. It used to happen when the systems were physical. These days, everything is online. The state has 1,535 police stations where you can get your FIR registered either digitally or online. There is no question of cases not being reported.

Q. Similar accusations were made regarding Covid deaths in the state. That a large number of deaths went unaccounted for, that bodies were cremated on the banks of the Ganga...
Whoever says this has to be the biggest scoundrel. The world has appreciated UP's Covid model. It is worthy of global emulation, and we have done so under the guidance of the prime minister. All our services—the number of tests, how many people have been admitted to hospitals, how many are in isolation—are reflected on our online portal. Anyone can see this information on the portal. Such misinformation is being spread by those who were power brokers earlier but have now been rendered jobless.

> **"Rather than give tickets to women to fight elections, we work towards empowering them. Our Mission Shakti programme is aimed towards their honour, safety and self-reliance"**

Q. Your government says your tenure has seen investments in excess of Rs 4 lakh crore. Are they just proposals as yet?
Projects worth Rs 4 lakh crore have been implemented on the ground. More than half of these units have already started production. We have given employment to 1.61 crore youth in the state. The reforms in UP along with the better law and order situation and sectoral policies have helped. In 2016, UP was in 14th place in the Ease of Doing Business rankings. It is now in second position. These achievements are the results of reforms. Thus UP is emerging as an industrial hub. The state is now among the top three investment destinations in the country.

Q. Would you call it 'Yoginomics'?
It's not Yoginomics but UP economics. It is not just investment, it is linked to employment.

Q. Unemployment is expected to be a big issue this election?
One should see the unemployment rate in Uttar Pradesh in 2015-16 and the unemployment rate as of date. CMIE (the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy) data puts the current unemployment rate in UP at 4.9 per cent whereas it was 18 per cent in 2016-17.

Q. The menace of stray cattle seems to have become an election issue.
It is not an election issue. It is being raised by those who were involved in illegal slaughtering. We put an end to their illegal slaughtering and their smuggling of cattle. We have also come up with a *gauvansh* scheme to preserve cattle and incentivise farmers who participate in the scheme.

Q. If re-elected, what do you propose to do in the next five years?
We have already prepared the roadmap for the next five years. UP will become a trillion-dollar economy. Our committees are already working in that direction. One-trillion dollar economy means doubling the per capita income of the people in the state. It will bring joy in the life of the common man and raise their standard of living. The UP model will become an example for the rest of the country.

Q. In case you lose, will you continue in politics or return to being a Mahant again?
I have never accepted defeat and have never lost.

Q. What message would you want to give Akhilesh Yadav?
As the leader of a political party, Akhileshji has every right to fight an election. But he must be prepared for a massive defeat on March 10, 2022. ■

ASSEMBLY POLLS 2022

PUNJAB

THE DARK HORSE OF PATIALA

The Amarinder-BJP joint stock company is banking on a blend of symbolism and ground synergy in this 'revenge' election

BY ANILESH S. MAHAJAN

ANGER, WELLING UP from a deep sense of humiliation, has turned into a steely determination to wipe out one party from the political map of Punjab. That party is the Congress, and the man involved is someone who has spent 27 years of his political life as a Congressman. If that suffices as a statement on the Grand Old Party, it also catches Amarinder Singh in a sunset moment he would have perhaps liked to visualise differently. A two-time chief minister, he's now playing for narrower stakes—unless you count the healing of injured pride as a valid electoral objective. With a hockey stick-and-ball as the symbol of his new party, the Punjab Lok Congress (PLC), he has hit the astroturf as a junior alliance partner—contesting 37 seats against the BJP's 65, accepting

CAPT'S CALL Amarinder with supporters in Patiala, Jan. 4

the reduced stature as a matter of exigency. Several of his loyalists have even joined the saffron party, reinforcing the image of Amarinder doing the playmaker's job as a floater on the left wing, so to speak, for the national party.

The game won't be easy. For one, there's the curious fact that Amarinder is going in as an Opposition leader who has to bear the burden of anti-incumbency, having been booted out as CM—amidst much low drama—as recently as mid-September. Not to speak of his reputation as a reclusive administrator who ran his regime from his farmhouse in the outskirts of Chandigarh, mostly via a coterie. But both he and the BJP—and the third partner, Sukhdev Dhindsa's Shiromani Akali Dal (Sanyukt), which is contesting 17 seats—are banking on a blend of symbolism and synergy on the ground. Punjab's electoral field, historically bipolar, is also unusually crowded this time, a fact they hope to play to their advantage.

Out of the PLC's 37 battle sites, 26 are in the Malwa region, concentrated around the erstwhile Phulkian Estate, homebase of the Patiala fiefdom, of which he is the titular maharaja. Malwa has 69 seats and most will see multi-cornered contests. A traditional Akali stronghold, the Aam Aadmi Party had made noticeable gains here after 2014. The farm agitation was most furious in this region too; the farm unions are serious competitors this time. Winning against such odds would be as much a question of luck, of a favourable turn on voting day, as anything else.

But more than electoral gains, the BJP is hoping the alliance with the 80-year-old former CM will open doors to newer territories. This includes fishing in the unquiet waters of Sikh politics. Amarinder is perhaps uniquely placed here as a facilitator. For, the ex-Congressman is also an ex-Akali man, who has had quite an eclectic political journey. The PLC is Amarinder's fourth party. After starting with the Congress circa 1980, brought in by his Doon School mate Rajiv Gandhi, he quit after Operation Blue Star and shifted to the Akali Dal. His next 14 years were spent on that side of the spectrum—for a brief while, he even floated his own Sikh hardline outfit, the Akali Dal (Panthic). Though he rejoined the Congress in 1998, becoming the alpha and omega of the state unit for over two decades, he knows the vocabulary of Sikh politics quite well. That's why a BJP leader says, "Amarinder will be one of the many helping hands for the BJP to understand those nuances."

Amarinder is also balancing that with some choice symbolism on the nationalist side—riffing on national security, the threat of militancy and drug trafficking. Perhaps ironic for a leader whose old images from a gurudwara in Dixie, Canada, had the brass-lettered words 'Khalistan Zindabad' written prominently in the background. Yet, as a man who often boasts of his three years in the Indian army's Sikh regiment, he's always comfortable in nationalistic fabric. He has, in fact, been taking potshots at state Congress chief Navjot Sidhu, claiming that in 2019, Pakistan prime minister Imran Khan had approached him through a common contact to have Sidhu reinducted in the cabinet.

Punjab's electorate has an often under-acknowledged presence—Hindus, 38.5 per cent of the state's population, and they are either in majority or dominate the results in 45 seats. The BJP is contesting 30 of them, but 10 are with PLC. That, along with the moderate Sikh base Amarinder himself nurtured during his long years as Congress CM, will form the primary catchment zone for the alliance. Amarinder is playing to that gallery, speaking of Punjab's "hard-earned peace" and saying the alliance has come together for the sake of national security. Whether incidents like the sacrilege at a Kali temple in Patiala will galvanise that part of the landscape, and help paper over the alliance's weak cadre base, remains to be seen. ■

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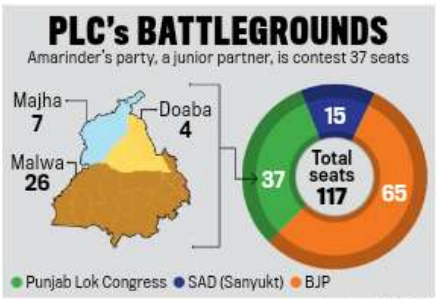


Graphic by ASIT ROY

ASSEMBLY POLLS 2022

UTTARAKHAND

AS YOUNG AS THE HILLS?

https://t.me/Digital_eLibrary

The BJP hopes to stave off anti-incumbency and a troubled legacy by focusing on a critical constituency: the youth

BY ANILESH S. MAHAJAN

It was a rainy Saturday afternoon in Dehradun. Uttarakhand chief minister Pushkar Singh Dhami had wound up after recording a video message at the adjoining camp office—his official residence, a 10-acre affair on New Cantonment Road that his predecessors thought to be jinxed, would have seemed an auspicious place to park himself on such a day. Winter rains cause more than just a dip in temperatures in these parts, and he had had to suspend his campaign travel. It would have been foolhardy to risk getting stuck on a winding mountain highway, with a landslide ahead and a steep fall on one side, just a fortnight or so before polling.

That hypothetical scenario, in fact, can well serve as a visual metaphor for the situation 46-year-old Dhami finds himself in. The hill state casts its ballot on February 14 to elect a new 70-member assembly, and the dew-fresh CM, coronated only last July, could well be staring at a future that's blocked off, with peril lurking on all sides. Indeed, in that locked-down pose, Dhami could well symbolise any young Uttarakhandi, facing a similar cul-de-sac when it comes to life-chances. That's precisely why he is meeting this battle with a campaign designed to appeal to that demographic. With good reason—60 per cent of the state's voters are younger than Dhami. Promising to unlock futures for everyone would be a good start.

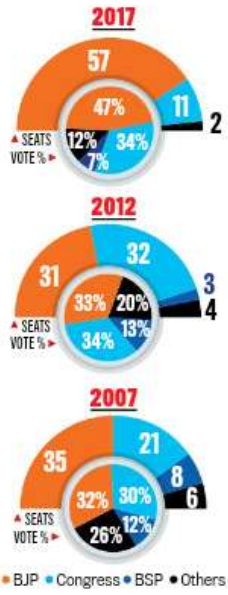
History is his first obstacle. No Uttarakhand CM, except N.D. Tiwari, has ever completed his tenure or managed a repeat mandate. In fact, in the last two assembly polls, the incumbent CMs had to face ignominious defeats in their own seats—in 2017, Harish Rawat lost from both the segments he contested.

The present is no less unkind. Campaign restrictions have left the BJP bereft of its chief weapon: there's nothing like a Modi rally to galvanise voters in this neck of the woods. "The PM's presence impacts voters for sure," says a top BJP leader. The local party unit is keeping its fingers crossed, hoping they will be able to slip in at least one rally before polling day. The IT/ social media brigade is out in full strength, but that's a poor substitute for the real thing. "We don't know how the digital outreach will pan out," says the partyman.

All this makes Dhami's job quite daunting. His surprise elevation seven months ago had come at the end of a

THE STORY SO FAR

Total seats 70



Graphic by ASIT ROY

CLICKING WITH THE YOUTH
CM Pushkar Singh Dhami poses for a selfie during an event held in Dehradun honouring meritorious girl students of Uttarakhand, Oct. 11, 2021

WITH THE BJP TRYING TO WOO UTTARAKHAND'S YOUTH, HAVING 46-YEAR-OLD DHAMI, YOUNGEST IN THE CABINET, AT THE HELM SUITS THE PARTY WELL

dizzying bout of roulette—the central leadership dumped Trivendra Rawat and then Tirath Singh Rawat within four months, leaving him with a less-than-pretty administrative legacy. He also found himself at the helm of a greying cabinet: Dhami himself was its youngest and juniormost member. Cannily enough, he and his party have doubled down on that theme. This is just as well, because Uttarakhand's 79.4 lakh-strong electorate has around 12 lakh new voters. The narrative on this front suits the BJP: the Congress's CM aspirant, Harish Rawat, is 73; the next in line, Pritam Singh, is 63. The BJP has fielded 22 new faces, 14 of them younger than Dhami.

The youth focus addresses a key pain point for the BJP regime. Two months after Dhami took over, NSO data for October-December 2020 showed that 27 per cent of Uttarakhand in the 15-29 age bracket were jobless (higher than the national average of 25 per cent). The graph had peaked at 38 per cent during the lockdown, and never receded to the pre-Covid 21 per cent. Also, 500,000 natives migrated back to the state during this period, their life in the metros disrupted by the pandemic. Worst of all, neither regular industry in the slender patch of low-lands in southern Uttarakhand nor the tourism and hospitality segment in the hills have recovered from the massive hit they took. All that marks out a perennial theme in these parts in red highlighter ink. "Uttarakhand's youth has been plagued by unemployment for long now," admits Jay Singh Rawat, a Dehradun-based political analyst.

Dhami's problem is that he has nothing much to show right now except promises. On December 30, the PM had laid the foundation stones for 23 projects worth over Rs 17,500 crore. On the anvil are multiple road-widening projects, a hydropower project in Dhami's own homestead of Pithoragarh in the far east, and a sewerage network upgradation in Nainital. All this sounds more productive than the Rs 5,000 monthly dole AAP's Arvind Kejriwal is promising, but it is all work in progress—to use the optimistic phrase—and will take time to bear fruit in terms of real jobs. That's why one of Dhami's aides calls attention to a 'dual' strategy: "In order to pull up the BJP's prospects, Dhami has to streamline stuck projects to generate jobs, and also appeal to the emotions of his voters."

This is where Hindutva and nationalism come in—Uttarakhand, which hosts some of Hinduism's holiest pilgrimage sites and sends droves of youth to the armed forces, is particularly receptive to that line of politics. But Hindutva can be a complex game to play here. The temples, seers and akharas operate at a level of conservatism often vastly deeper than that of the BJP-RSS—and have a fiercely autonomous streak to boot. None of the BJP's CMs can hope to exert any influence on them. In fact, Modi had to intervene and convince the akharas to scale down Kumbh celebrations at Haridwar last year. Trivendra Singh Rawat, an old RSS hand, prised open a faultline there during his stint as CM with a legislation that sought to take over administrative control of the Char Dham—Kedarnath, Badrinath, Gangotri and Yamunotri—besides 49 other temples. The howls of protests started from the seers, spread to the VHP and Trivendra's old buddies in the RSS, and inevitably reached the assembly halls. Recently, the Dhami regime, too, had to risk the wrath of the saffron-robed ones when, on instructions from the PMO, he finally cracked down on hate speeches at the Haridwar dharam sansad.

There's another perennial faultline in Uttarakhand: the emotional divide between the two hill divisions of Garhwal and Kumaon. Here too, Trivendra had stirred a hornet's nest by notifying Gairsain as a third hill division, with districts from both Garhwal and Kumaon—the latter would have had to cede even its cultural capital, Almora! In the end, along with his ill-fated temple bill, this ensured he was practically escorted out of office with black flags. While the ex-CM has plenty time to repent at leisure, the BJP is hoping the relatively young Dhami can wind the clock forward. His real hope may lie in the fact that the Congress, otherwise well-placed for a pendulum swing, is excellent at the art of fratricide. ■

THE MIC

"I am surprised seeing the BSP has not become active. (Mayawati) is very quiet, I am not able to understand. It's possible the BJP government is exerting pressure"

PRIYANKA GANDHI
Congress gen. secy, UP in-charge

"The Congress condition is so miserable in UP, their CM candidate changed her stand within a few hours. It's better if people don't waste their vote on them"

MAYAWATI
BSP supremo

TWEET

UP POLICE
'ABSOLUT' ORDER- If you are transporting illicit liquor through the state of Uttar Pradesh, please do avail of our "WAREHOUSE' & spend some 'MAGIC MOMENTS' in our guest house to be welcomed with a 'ROYAL SALUTE'
Availing of this offer is mandatory & free of cost!
A PERFECT BLEND OF LAW & ENFORCEMENT

PUNJAB

BARAAT WITHOUT GROOM?

Illustration by SIDDHANT JUMDE

Words have a way of swinging back in the air towards you and, right now, Navjot Singh Sidhu must be feeling the unique pleasure of being sliced up by one's own boomerang. In the run-up to the previous poll, and even during this campaign, the motormouth chief of the Punjab Congress was continuously taking digs at the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) for not having announced a chief ministerial face. They were taking out a "*baraat* without a *dulha* (a marriage procession sans a groom)", he sneered. But now, all sides except the BJP-led combo have formally anointed a name for the top job. The AAP elevated comedian-turned-neta Bhagwant Mann, the Akalis have Sukhbir Badal...even the farm unions have projected Balbir Sidhu!

It's no secret that Sidhu too badly wants himself coronated. To

WINDOW SEAT
DHURI, PUNJAB

COMMONERS VS KINGS

In an election not short of hair-trigger contests, the spotlight fell on Dhuri when the Aam Aadmi party (AAP) decided to field its 48-year-old chief ministerial candidate, Bhagwant Mann, from this seat in the heart of the Malwa belt. The comedian-turned-neta goes up against a popular sitting MLA, Dalvir Singh Khangura, 40, fondly known as Goldy, a sharp but soft-spoken Congressman with a hands-on approach and an outreach to all villages in his constituency. But over and above Mann's fate, Dhuri, part of the Sangrur Lok Sabha constituency that he has held twice, opens up a fascinating landscape that contains all of Punjab's political colours. The Malwa region, lying southeast of the Sutlej river,

his dismay, the party bosses are in no mood to indulge him. The fractious state unit has no shortage of Sidhu-baiters either. His opponents are clearly enjoying his discomfiture. Sukhbir didn't lose the chance to let go a reverse-sweep: "Where is his *baraat*, who are his *baraatis*...," he asked.

Now, Punjab '22 has already seen some hasty shotgun weddings between former foes. But the BJP has also been attracting a few new, unlikely *baraatis*. On Guru Gobind Singh's 357th birth anniversary on January 9, Prime Minister Narendra Modi lobbed a feelgood sop in the air—the martyrdom day of the last guru's younger sons would be observed as Vir Bal Diwas, he said. The SGPC (Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee) didn't exactly warm to the gesture, but the PM got an ally from within the Panthic community. From Baba Harnam Singh Dhumma, chief of the Damdami Taksal—the controversial Sikh seminary once headed by Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale! Days later, Dhumma's close associate, Sikh scholar Sarchand Singh, even joined the BJP.

A day earlier, there had been another notable entrant: the grandson of late Akali icon Gurcharan Singh Tohra. Now, this is the kind of unexpected googly that may have foxed Sidhu the Batsman back in the day. For long, BJP was almost an "untouchable" in Panthic politics. To see a young Tohra in its ranks is a change it will welcome—Tohra Sr was SGPC chief for over 25 years, and the family is still respected in Panthic circles. And the Damdami Taksal...baby steps in a more ambitious strategy, perhaps? ■

PARTY LINE: *NPP*

PAN-NORTHEAST? IT'S AN IDEA

Most observers tend to view the Manipur election as a clash between the two better-known national parties: the BJP and Congress. But a regional force—and not one of Manipuri origin at that—is hoping to carve out a steady, silent route to power. Currently part of the BJP-led government in Manipur, the National People's Party (NPP) has chosen to go solo, aspiring to yank its numbers up from four to something in double digits in the 60-member House. This is part of NPP president Conrad K. Sangma's calculated design. Conrad, former Lok Sabha Speaker P.A. Sangma's son and Meghalaya CM, plans to turn the NPP into a true pan-Northeast party. That's a unique experiment in ecumenism in a region beset by inter-state, inter-ethnic rivalries. The NPP is already spreading its organisational wings across the Northeast, including in Assam. Sangma's style is to let the local units decide the narrative instead of foisting his views on them. (His only preference is the word 'tribal' be abjured; he votes for 'indigenous'.) Leading the party in Manipur is deputy CM and ex-DGP Yumnam Joykumar Singh and his Oxford-educated daughter Ratika. ■

NATIONAL FOOTPRINT DREAMS Conrad Sangma

BANDEEP SINGH

has 14 of the state's 22 districts. Dhuri also falls squarely within what's called 'Royal Punjab'–the Phulkian belt that includes the erstwhile princely estates of Patiala, Nabha, Faridkot, Jind and Malerkotla. For decades, this region remained a hotbed of Naxalism. Later, the sectarian Khalistan movement also found fertile ground here. In recent times, this was the epicentre of the farm agitation. And the instances of sacrilege that roiled Punjab also played out here. All these are live factors–the hold exerted by the erstwhile royalty (all Jat Sikh, save for Malerkotla's Pathan rulers), Communist sympathies, and a defiant Sikh identitarianism that even went against the abrogation of Article 370 and the CAA. The trading Brahmins and Baniyas, who dominate the urban centres, are often the swing voters–their influence is such that even the Akali Dal has fielded a Hindu candidate. The AAP won 18 of its 20 seats in 2017 from these parts, but this is also Amarinder Singh's backyard, as it is of the farm unions. Commoners against kings, in a way. ■

GOA

Lost His Paes?

With his trademark Jack-in-the-box enthusiasm, Leander Paes had rushed to the forecourt. In November, just a month after formally joining the Trinamool Congress (TMC) in the presence of Mamata Banerjee, the tennis ace virtually hit the campaign trail—meeting voters across all walks of life in Velim constituency, south Goa. He got a rousing welcome as he met people early morning, interacting with fisherfolk and promising to resolve their problems if the TMC is voted to power.

The 1996 Atlanta Olympic bronze medalist had focused on Velim—named after a large village mentioned in old Konkan/Kannada chronicles—because his father Vece, the former India hockey midfielder who played in the 1972 Munich Olympics, hails from the village. Paes projected himself as a son of the soil who has returned to his roots after spending most of his life outside—first in Calcutta, where he was born, then in Mumbai. That flurry of net action, naturally, meant he wished to contest—and he openly expressed that desire. But of late, Paes has vanished from the scene. The TMC has now fielded Benjamin Silva, a Congress turncoat, from Velim. ■

FISHY AFFAIR Paes out and about in Velim

ANI

GOA

IT'S RAINING REBELS

Tired of hung assemblies? Dying to see a comfortable majority? Well, Goa has it already. A whopping 29 of the 40 members of its outgoing assembly have switched sides since 2017—some 14 of them in this very season. Cumulatively, these worthies could well stake claim to form a Government of Defectors. Though, of course, it would be counter-logical to form a party of defectors—if its members stay loyal to the ideology, they can no longer hang around together! But this is not just a theoretical game. Come February 14, these rebels may play a crucial role in forming the next government—poised as they are to swing 12-15 constituencies.

Though reminiscent of the late '90s-early 2000s, a phase of intense uncertainty that pushed Goa back on the development front, the numbers are unprecedented. The trend caught on even before the outgoing assembly was constituted in March 2017. Vishwajeet Rane quit the Congress because it failed

Illustration by SIDDHANT JUMDE

to form the government despite emerging as the single-largest party with 17 seats. The BJP beckoned—an attractive offer since the party was much better at forming governments. He won a bypoll and duly became health minister. Two of his former confreres, Subhash Shirodkar and Dayanand Sopte, followed in October 2018. They too won bypolls from Shiroda and Mandre, respectively. Over time, that slow blood loss became a case of full-blown haemorrhage. The Congress goes into election with its 2017 tally of 17 reduced to two.

One catalyst for this was the late Manohar Parrikar. As chief minister, he led a coalition government comprising the BJP, the Maharashtrawadi Gomantak Party (MGP), the Goa Forward Party (GFP) and three independents. The new incumbent, Pramod Sawant, ended the association with the MGP and GFP, sacking the two deputy CMs from those parties, Sudin Dhavalikar and Vijai Sardesai, within 10 days. Helpfully, two of the three MGP MLAs broke away and merged their group into BJP.

Over time, the slow blood loss became a case of full-blown haemorrhage for Congress

The Congress pegged one back when it won the Panaji bypoll in May 2019 (necessitated by Parrikar's death). The score now was—BJP: 16, Congress: 15. But just two months later, the GOP received its biggest jolt as 10 of its 15 MLAs rebelled against the party, formed a separate group, and later merged it with the BJP. The BJP now had 26 and Sawant became their first CM to have two-thirds majority in the House.

After a two-year lull, in October 2021, then state Congress chief Luizinho Faleiro defected to the TMC, marking that party's re-entry in Goa after 2012. That set off a whole feeding frenzy all around. The only one to swim against the current was Michael Lobo—he left the BJP for the Congress, miffed at wife Delailah being denied a ticket. Former BJP chief minister Laxmikant Parsekar left the party a wee more embarrassed by quitting too. He will contest as an independent. ■

–with Anilesh S. Mahajan, Kaushik Deka, Kiran D. Tare and Prashant Srivastava

UP

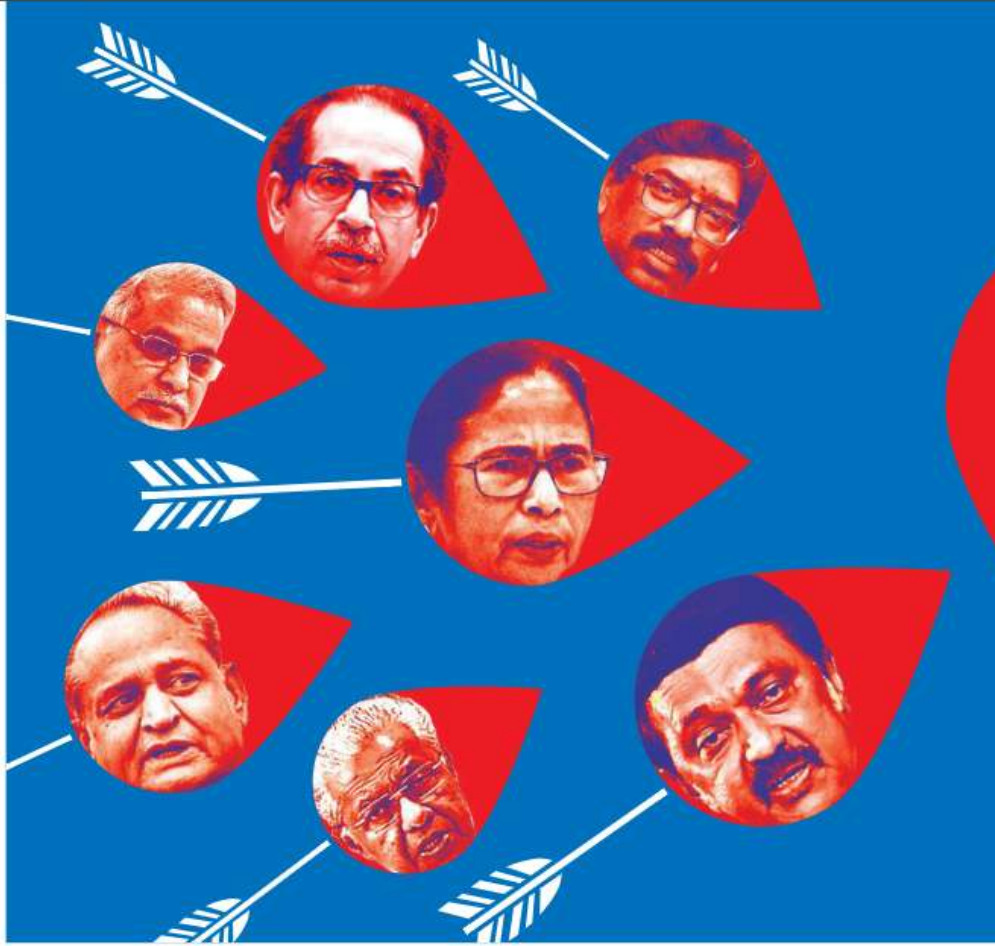
TWO DOWN

There's no telling what effect words can have. Days after Priyanka Gandhi said, only half in jest, that there was "no other face" in UP, the Congress has lost two of its recognisable faces...from its already slim roster of recognisable faces! R.P.N. Singh, the former Union MoS for home who retains a footprint in native Kushinagar as ex-royalty, has decided to start "a new chapter". The other: Imran Masood, former party secretary and a name to reckon with in Saharanpur. Just a day ago, a video had gone viral where Imran was talking about his humiliation at the hands of the Samajwadi Party. The next day, hey presto, he had jumped ship. What explained the yo-yo motion? Say SP sources: "Earlier, Imran wanted two tickets, one for himself, one for his aide—and got annoyed when that didn't happen. Later, he tried for a BSP ticket but Akhileshji somehow managed to retain him." ■

UTTARAKHAND

KHANDURI, STILL ZAROORI

In 2012, BJP campaign workers painted the walls in Uttarakhand with the slogan, 'Khanduri Hai Zaroori'. He was seen as the party's fulcrum here, and ticked all boxes–the army veteran, with firebrand oratory to match, stood out with his clean image and can-do spirit. Cut to the present, and for a while the contrast was stark: the BJP seemed all too eager to bury that chapter. B.C. Khanduri was forced to retire in 2019, citing the 75-year age criterion. His US-returned son Manish was next to be denied a ticket. But those who were calling it the end of the Khanduri era are eating their words. Daughter Ritu has bucked the trend with a ticket from family fief Kotdwar, in the Pauri region. ■



UNCIVIL STRIFE

New Delhi's demand that AIS officers do mandatory central deputation is primed to become another Centre-states dispute

BY AMARNATH K. MENON

Illustration by TANMOY CHAKRABORTY

A January 12 letter from the Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT) of the Union ministry of home affairs (MHA) to the states has the latter up in umbrage. The letter called for responses by January 25 to a proposal for changes in sharing of bureaucrats from the All India Services (AIS), which includes the Indian Administrative Service (IAS), Indian Police Service (IPS) and Indian Forest Service (IFoS).

The DoPT letter comes in the wake of a perceived shortage of AIS officers in Union ministries. It says the states "are not sponsoring an adequate number of officers for central deputation", leading to a shortage in meeting Union government needs. Its earlier letters (on December 20 and 27 and January 7) soliciti comments from the states elicited limited response, prompting it to revise the proposal in the January 12 letter. Earlier last year, the DoPT had cautioned the states that not sending enough officers may affect future cadre review proposals. The Centre is apparently unable to fill vacancies at director and joint secretary levels in various Union ministries. Among the Central Secretariat Service (CSS) posts lying vacant, 390 are at joint secretary level (experience of 19-plus years) and 540 are for deputy secretary (nine years) or director ranks (14 years of service).

At stake now is the move to amend Rule 6 of the IAS (Cadre) Rules, 1954, which governs central deputation in the IAS. According to it, an AIS officer can be posted at the Centre with the concurrence (no objection certificate) of the concerned state government. The DoPT asks states to send an annual list of names of AIS officers willing to go on central deputation, from which it then selects officers. The new proposal is prompted by a persistent shortage of officers on central deputation. As of January 1, 2021, only 458 IAS officers were on central deputation out of around 5,200 IAS officers in the country. Indeed, some states have nominated very few officers for deputation to the Centre. Madhya Pradesh (with just 24 of 370 IAS officers on central deputation), West Bengal (28 out of 298), Rajasthan (12 out of 241) and Telangana (9 out of 164) are conspicuous on this list (see *Cadre-wise Breakup of IAS Officers*). In fact, actual deputation as a percentage of the mandated reserves fell from 69 per cent in 2014 to 30 per cent in 2021, suggesting that the DoPT has a valid concern.

EARLIER CHANGES

The DoPT has already made two significant changes in less than a decade. In August 2017, the Union government revised the cadre allocation policy, ostensibly to ensure national integration of the bureaucracy and ensure an all-India character for the services. The existing state cadre were divided into five zones. Under the policy, a candidate has to first give their choice in descending order of preference from among the zones. Subsequently, they have to indicate a preferred cadre from each selected zone. The second cadre preference for every preferred zone is indicated subsequently. The process continues till the candidate exhausts the list. No change is permitted afterwards. Officers continue to work in the cadre they are allotted or are deputed to the Government of India. In 2020, to ensure more officers at the Centre, the DoPT made it mandatory for IAS officers from the 2007 batch on to serve at least three years on central deputation at the level of deputy secretary and above in order to be considered for empanelment and appointment in higher ranks—as a joint secretary, additional secretary or secretary.

Now, Delhi wants to acquire overriding power if the state delays sending an officer on central deputation. It has proposed that "the officer shall stand relieved from cadre from the date as may be specified by the central government".

The problem is that the majority of bureaucrats are comfortable staying in the states. But central deputation of the AIS officers, be it IAS or IPS, ensures a two-way movement of officers which is beneficial for the states as well the Union government. It also enhances domain expertise of individual officers and widens their experience.

COMBATIVE FEDERALISM

The states, though, view the move with suspicion. West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee was the first to assert her opposition in a letter to the prime minister on January 13. In her third letter on the issue, she called it a draconian move, emphasising that the proposed amendment is against the "spirit of co-operative federalism", "taking the matter to non-federal extremes" besides being against the "basic structure of India's constitutional scheme".

Banerjee knows all too well what central interference can mean. Last year, the DoPT directed West Bengal chief secretary Alapan Bandyopadhyay to report to its office in Delhi hours after the chief minister allegedly skipped a review meeting on Cyclone Yaas with Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The 1987 batch IAS officer, who had never been on central deputation, was to superannuate on May 31. He is now fighting a case against the Centre.

The Centre's proposal has provoked other chief ministers too to join the chorus. Tamil Nadu's M.K. Stalin points out that it empowers the Centre to enlist any officer without the concurrence of the concerned state and place them "in perpetual fear of being penalised by the Union government at any time". Jharkhand's Hemant Soren argues it will create a fear psychosis in an IAS officer and adversely affect his "objectivity, performance and efficiency" and prevent him from offering candid opinion in matters that can be construed as "taking sides in sensitive matters of Centre-state disputes".

Yet others invoke the federal spirit to claim it is an attempt to undermine the states' authority. Chhattisgarh chief minister Bhupesh Baghel warns that if implemented, it may lead to the collapse of the administrative system of states. He claims that as a result of the amendments, officers posted in various important capacities will be assailed by a sense of instability and ambiguity. "They will be in a dilemma while discharging their duties and due to political interference, it will not be possible for them to work impartially, particularly at the time of elections," says Baghel. The protests, of course, are largely from non-BJP-ruled states.

What the states find most galling is that while New Delhi seeks to consult the states on the number of officers to be deputed to the Centre, it wants overriding powers in case of any disagreement. With similar proposals for the IPS and IFoS, the states are apprehensive that this is an attempt to subvert their authority guaranteed by the Constitution.

THE LENGTH AND BREADTH OF THREE SERVICES

How IAS, IPS and IFoS officers are shared by the states and the Centre

IAS

TOTAL STRENGTH	5,231
POSTED AT THE CENTRE	458
POSTED IN STATE AND UT CADRE	4,773
IAS OFFICERS PROMOTED FROM STATE CIVIL SERVICES	1,316

IPS

TOTAL STRENGTH	3,049
PROMOTED FROM STATE CIVIL SERVICES	1,060
OFFICERS WHO CAN BE DEPUTED TO THE CENTRE	1,075

IFoS

TOTAL STRENGTH	2,224
PROMOTED FROM STATE CIVIL SERVICES	967
OFFICERS WHO CAN BE DEPUTED TO THE CENTRE	382

"THE GoI CANNOT RUN EFFECTIVELY WITH JUST 458 IAS OFFICERS SERVING IT. THE QUALITY OF GOVERNANCE, INDEED OF BOTH POLICY DESIGN AND EXECUTION, DEPENDS A LOT ON THE HAND AT THE WHEEL"

–SRIVATSA KRISHNA, *IAS*

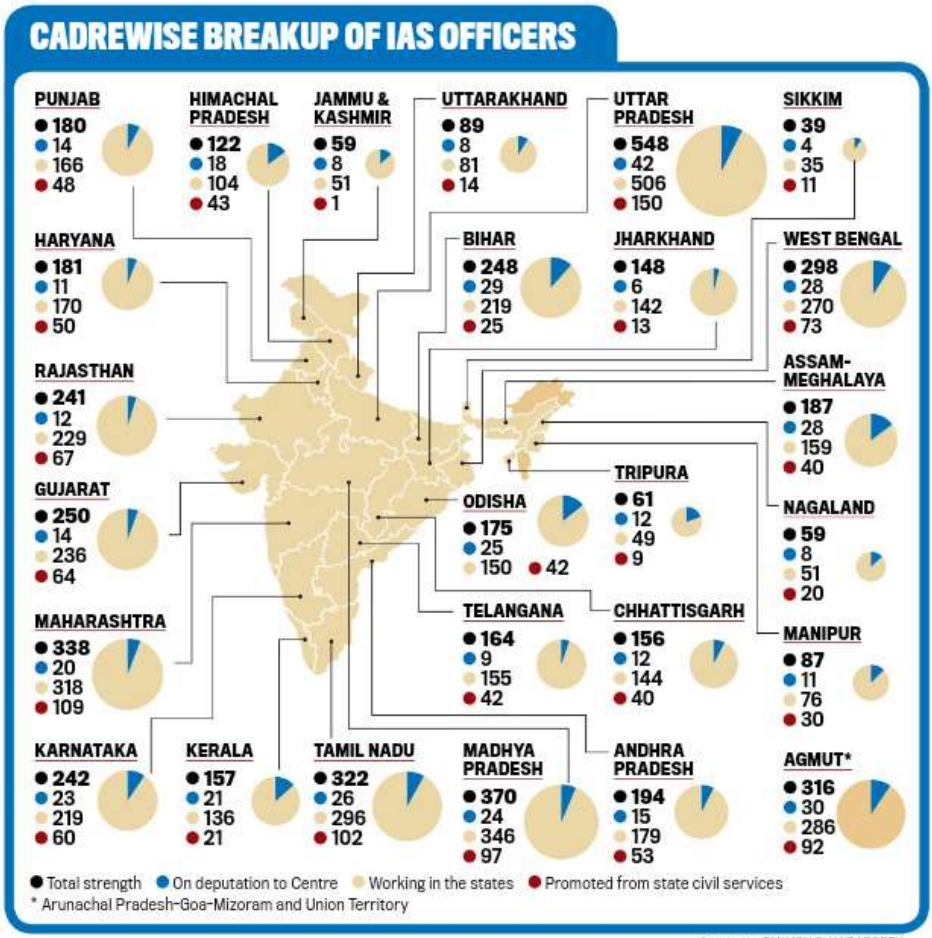
OFFICERS' PLIGHT

The bureaucrats are in a quandary and, in private, fear the proposed changes expose them to reprisal. A major concern is the Union government arrogating to itself the authority to seek the services of any IAS officer for a central assignment. In effect, a bureaucrat perceived to be close to a rival party government can be brought to Delhi as a punitive measure.

But some do endorse the proposal. "Camaraderie and cooperation among the Union and the states cannot, like federalism, be a one-sided construct. It cuts both ways," argues Srivatsa Krishna, a 1994 batch IAS officer now on a sabbatical. "The Government of India (GoI) cannot run effectively with just 458 IAS officers serving it. The quality of governance, indeed of both policy design and execution, depends a lot on the hand at the wheel." He says any state treating AIS officers as officers of the state are flouting existing norms. Further, he asks, should the GoI not have the option of selecting specific officers for special situations, especially now when they are even bringing in professionals from the private sector?

Many, however, remain wary of the Centre's intentions. "India is a Union of states and that is how we have a central government. What is being attempted is to convert an All India Service as one under a centralised authority," rues retired bureaucrat and author M.G. Devasahayam.

Others say the problem goes deeper and involves the essential subjugation of an already much co-opted civil service. "When the Centre itself is pushing for lateral entry, what is the need for calling unwilling officers on deputation?" asks Ajit Kumar Singh, a retired IAS officer of Rajasthan. "This move will demoralise IAS officers and the services will lose their sheen in course of time. Short-sighted decisions can do long-



Graphic by TANMOY CHAKRABORTY

term damage to the polity." Yet others say that the problem is that a majority of officers do not want to work outside their state. They cite two reasons for it. One, the empanelment process is itself pitted against those going to the Union government. Two, the cadre develop a comfort in the state and do not want to take on an unknown (the Centre). Consequently, the AIS has effectively devolved into the provincial services.

"There is no premium on competence in the civil service. That is the problem. It is a self-imposed characteristic or virtue rather than externally demanded. What is demanded by bosses is only subservience," emphasises P.V. Ramesh, who retired from the Andhra Pradesh cadre. People choose to refer to the IAS as the steel frame but actually it is no frame at all, he says, likening bureaucrats to multiple amoebae put in a bowl and moving in different directions.

Ramesh suggests an overhaul of the governance structure (which has not been attempted in the past 75 years) as the IAS is too small for a complex country of 1.4 billion people. His solution: do not allot to a cadre for the first 12-14 years when you are expected to do field service and earn your spurs to go to the next level. At that stage, let an independent national civil service authority appraise performance along with the UPSC and decide the direction in which each one should go. Also make it mandatory for the officer to work with the Union government for a couple of years and only on completing it should the officer be allotted to any state. He feels the staff position should be national in an All India Service in order to have a bureaucracy that is independent and stands up for the rule of law while being part of the nation-building enterprise. ■

with Amitabh Srivastava, Rohit Parihar and Romita Datta

DEFENCE

AATMANIRBHAR BHARAT

A CALL TO INDIGENOUS ARMS

The ministry of defence has announced a series of measures to energise the flagging drive to manufacture indigenous weapons. The PMO itself is supervising the initiative. Will it work?

BY SANDEEP UNNITHAN

"No more imports of defence equipment"—these six stinging words from a defence ministry directive to top defence officials in January underlined the Narendra Modi government's growing impatience with its struggling initiative to indigenise defence hardware production. The directives from defence secretary Ajay Kumar outlined a jumpstart of its defence industrial base and a clampdown on imports.

It isn't the first such attempt, though. Make in India, announced in 2015, was a non-starter. Its reboot, Aatmanirbhar (self-reliant) Bharat, announced by PM Modi on May 12, 2020, hopes to chip away at India's dubious distinction of being the world's second-largest importer of military hardware. The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute says India was the world's second largest buyer of warships, fighter aircraft and missiles between 2016 and 2020 (roughly 60 per cent of its defence hardware is imported). Unfortunately, Make in India's new avatar, too, has been a slow starter. Though imports fell by 33 per cent between 2011-2015 and 2016-2020, a long import pipeline worth billions of dollars points to a cloudy future.

The government's mid-course impetus to Aatmanirbhar Bharat thus sets the roadmap for defence acquisitions over the next few years. "The PM is ramming indigenous programmes down the throats of users and the bureaucracy," a private sector CEO says. The ministry of defence (MoD) directives strike at the basics—to ensure specifications drafted by services or Service Qualitative Requirements (SQRs) are concretised at the start of a project to avoid mid-course design changes. It aims to create a level playing field for private industry and the government-owned defence industry. It calls for substantial reforms in the government's defence R&D wing—Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO)—and a thorough examination of foreign components in DRDO equipment. All off-the-shelf defence purchases, except government-to-government deals, are being reviewed. Defence deals where vendors don't assemble or produce components locally will be scrapped.

Defence imports are to be reviewed from the lens of whether or not they result in transfer of technology. Those that don't make the cut will face the axe. The MoD wants the armed forces to make emergency procurement of military hardware only from indigenous sources. Exceptions can only be signed off on by the Union defence minister Rajnath Singh.

However, there is only so much policy diktats can do. Globally, robust defence industrial bases are created over decades

TOP GUNS
Army chief General M.M. Naravane with the last batch of K9 Vajra howitzers at Larsen & Toubro's assembly line in Hazira, Gujarat, 2021

VIKRAM SHARMA

TALKING STRATEGY: Prime Minister Narendra Modi with Defence Minister Rajnath Singh

JUMPSTARTING AATMANIRBHAR BHARAT

The defence ministry is reviewing defence procurements to rejuvenate indigenous defence manufacturing. Some outlines of this new policy are...

- A ban on import of defence equipment
- Review of all existing defence imports
- Thrust on Indigenously Designed, Developed and Manufactured (IDDM) hardware
- Review of emergency procurements
- Level playing field for private sector
- Orders for items on positive indigenisation list
- Priority for DRDO reforms

of focused nurturing of indigenous industry and massive investments in research and development and exports to fund more R&D. The most recent such success story has been that of New Delhi's current bête noire—Beijing. From being the world's largest importer of military equipment in the early 2000s, China became the third largest arms exporter by 2015. Chinese arms are qualitatively inferior to the US and Russian systems, but offer cheap military hardware solutions for poorer nations in Asia and Africa.

Defence exports have been a recent pillar of the Modi government's drive to attain self-sufficiency in defence production. Heartenings, these have begun to yield results. The MoD informed Parliament in December that India had exported defence equipment worth Rs 8,434 crore in 2020-21, compared to Rs 1,940 crore in 2014-15. A recent breakthrough was an export order of three batteries of the ground-launched Indo-Russian Brahmos cruise missiles to the Philippines for $374.96 million (Rs 2,796 crore).

Lt Gen. D.B. Shekatkar (retd), author of a landmark 2016 MoD study on defence reforms, says defence exports indirectly offset the defence budget because they increase foreign exchange earnings. But they need to be bought by the armed forces first. "The first thing a foreign buyer wants to know is whether the item is in service in our armed forces," he says.

The reasons behind why past attempts to indigenise defence hardware have been Sisyphean are evident. Government slogans were not backed by a road map or annual targets. Licensed production of military hardware was being passed off as 'Make in India' with no benefits of design or the ability to upgrade the hardware. The number of Indigenously Designed, Developed and Manufactured (IDDM) defence systems, where Indian firms hold intellectual property, are in single digits.

Most importantly, a monopsony like the MoD has not been placing significant orders for indigenous defence platforms to allow the creation of defence ecosystems. "You cannot profess self-reliance and continue to import defence hardware," says a top government official. "Your indigenous industry will never come up as long as you are at the mercy of these three or four big defence exporters. Why will they let your industry develop?"

The global arms trade is without ethics but such sales can pose ethical dilemmas for its recipients. On January 23, Sweden's Saab announced it was selling disposable rocket launchers to the Indian armed forces. Saab has, in the past, sold surface-to-air missiles to the Pakistan army and advanced reconnaissance aircraft to its air force. Russia has sold its S-400 long-range missiles to both India and China. India's current border standoff has expanded the area of conflict with its northern neighbour. It has exposed voids in the army's defence preparedness, like the abysmal state of its air defence corps which are meant to protect heavy units like tanks and infantry combat vehicles from aerial attack, and the lack of long-range artillery to target Chinese units. This is why General Vinod Khandare, former military adviser to the National Security Advisor (NSA), warns. "Indigenisation is important, but a balance must be struck. You cannot create hollowness or a void in defence capabilities," he says.

A 2019 MoD projection sees the Indian armed forces buying hardware worth over $130 billion (Rs 9.7 lakh crore) over this decade. The MoD directives point to a desire to ensure that much of this is bought from or produced in-country.

The Indian defence industry is largely self-sufficient in land and naval platforms. Except engines and electronic warfare subsystems, most equipment fitted inside tanks, armoured vehicles and warships is made within India. The DRDO says it is self-reliant in missiles and radars. Hindustan Aeronautics Ltd's prowess with developing variants of the Dhruv Advanced Light Helicopter, like the Light Utility Helicopter and Light Combat Helicopter, has ensured self-sufficiency in light helicopters. Designing and developing fighter jets is the only area of import dependence. The navy and air force say they will need to buy foreign fighter jets to bridge the gap between the arrival of ADA-HAL aircraft, like the Light Combat Aircraft Tejas, and new aircraft types like the LCA Mark 2 and the fifth generation Advanced Medium Combat Aircraft (AMCA).

The new initiative involves multiple ministries and departments. It is being overseen by the Prime Minister's Office, involves defence minister Singh, defence secretary Ajay Singh and NSA Ajit Doval and his National Security Council Secretariat (NSCS) to facilitate inter-ministerial coordination.

In December, the MoD approved one of the largest indigenous defence orders—200 K9 Vajra 155/ 52 mm self-propelled artillery guns from Larsen & Toubro worth over Rs 10,000 crore. These guns are designed by South Korea's

THE HIT LIST

Off-the-shelf purchases (excluding foreign military sales), with zero Make in India component or transfer of technology are either under review or have been axed

KA-226T
200 helicopters; **$1 billion** (Rs 7,475.4 crore)

TWIN-ENGINED HELICOPTERS FOR COAST GUARD
14 helicopters; **$1 billion**

VERY SHORT RANGE AIR DEFENCE SYSTEM
5,175 missiles; **$1.5 billion** (Rs 11,213.1 crore)

155mm TOWED GUN SYSTEM
400 guns; **Rs 4,000 crore**

SELF-PROPELLED AIR DEFENCE GUN SYSTEM
104; **$2.4 billion** (Rs 17,941 crore)

SIG 716 RIFLES
72,400 rifles; Upwards of **Rs 700 crore**

QUICK REACTION SURFACE-TO-AIR MISSILES
56 mobile launcher systems; **$1.5 billion**

AIRBUS

Hanwha Defence but have progressively been indigenised by L&T in a specially made assembly line in Hazira, Gujarat. The K9 order is likely to be announced during the MoD's biennial DefExpo to be held between March 10 and 13 this year.

The MoD directive had its origin in meetings with the PM in November 2021. The presentation made by then secretary (defence production) Raj Kumar outlined why the Aatmanirbhar Bharat policy was a slow starter. Kumar had successfully carried out the MoD's largest restructuring—cracking up the four-decade old Ordnance Factory Board and 41 factories to turn it into seven state-owned corporations. The presentation outlined how despite the MoD's 'positive indigenisation list'—a ban on importing 351 items since 2020—the services had not placed a single order on an Indian manufacturer. Government-owned defence public sector undertakings (DPSUs) were spending billions of dollars importing components for indigenous defence systems.

On January 6, the MoD Defence Procurement Board (DPB) began drawing up a 'kill list' of imported equipment, hacking away at deals for helicopters, missiles and assault rifles which would not add to India's technology base. On January 14, the Indian army placed a $20 million (Rs 149.5 crore) order with private sector drone-maker Ideaforge, the largest such order on a private firm.

Lt Gen Subrata Saha, former deputy chief of the army staff and member of the National Security Advisory Board (NSAB), predicts a threefold jump in private sector defence orders over the next few years. "Until July last year, the total defence business was Rs 80,000 crore, with Rs 63,000 crore coming from the DPSUs and Rs 17,000 crore from the private sector. The government has set a target for Rs 1.25 lakh crore by 2025. The increase of Rs 45,000 crore will mainly come from the private sector," he says.

THE MoD CALLS FOR SUBSTANTIAL REFORMS IN THE DRDO AND AN EXAMINATION OF FOREIGN COMPONENTS IN DRDO EQUIPMENT

Private sector firms say they need R&D funding to field indigenous products. "We don't have the business volumes to be able to invest more.... If the government gave the private sector a fraction of the Rs 21,000 crore it spends on the DRDO, it will transform Indian industry," says the CEO of a top defence firm.

Beijing's transformation has been backed by years of a focused government approach to capture defence technology, aided, no doubt, by what a 2020 Belfer Center paper calls "Chinese intellectual property theft in the range of $180 to $540 billion per year". Chinese state entities are believed to have used cyber espionage to vacuum detailed production designs from the West for use by their indigenous industry. India's approach to acquiring defence technology, as a private sector defence industry CEO puts it, has been more "Gandhian". It is unlikely that the Indian government will sign off on a grand IPR (intellectual property right) theft. What India needs instead, says the official, is comprehensive ease of doing business for start-ups and tax breaks. "The MoD needs to understand that there is a lack of experience, and our domain knowledge in several key areas is still at nascent stages. It is essential to hire overseas experts. The Japanese, Germans, Koreans and Chinese all followed this route, but here the hurdles make it impossible," says the CEO of a private sector start-up.

The few attempts at breaking free have yielded admirable results in niche technology areas. Four years ago, the IAF dangled a carrot of a Rs 100 crore order for a Meher Baba swarm drone contest. The IAF spent Rs 25 crore to handhold nearly 57 firms that began developing prototypes. The contest seeded an entire swarm drone ecosystem. It created multiple start-ups, like NewSpace Research and Tech which bagged a Rs 200 crore swarm drone order from the army last year, and saw the emergence of hungry young start-ups like Veda Defense Systems Pvt Ltd and Dhaksha Unmanned Systems. But these industries need orders if they are to grow.

L&T's K9 howitzers, for instance, created a supply chain of about 1,100 industrial partners, mostly MSMEs (micro, small and medium enterprises). These have delivered over 80 per cent indigenous work packages by locally producing over 14,000 types of components per howitzer and have achieved over 50 per cent indigenisation (by value).

In his 1990 book, *The Militarisation of Mother India*, defence analyst Ravi Rikhye noted how Chinese weaponry was then terribly crude, but entirely Chinese. 'No one can twist the Chinese tail. Military power, like any other power, cannot be borrowed. It has to be acquired from one's strength. Otherwise, we become another's surrogate,' he wrote. A compelling reason as any for why the government's newest initiative must succeed. ■

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THE PROFLIGATE GENERAL

ANDHRA CM JAGAN REDDY'S POPULIST WELFARE MEASURES HAVE GOT THE PEOPLE'S VOTE, BUT IT HAS ALSO LEFT THE STATE ON THE VERGE OF BANKRUPTCY

By AMARNATH K. MENON

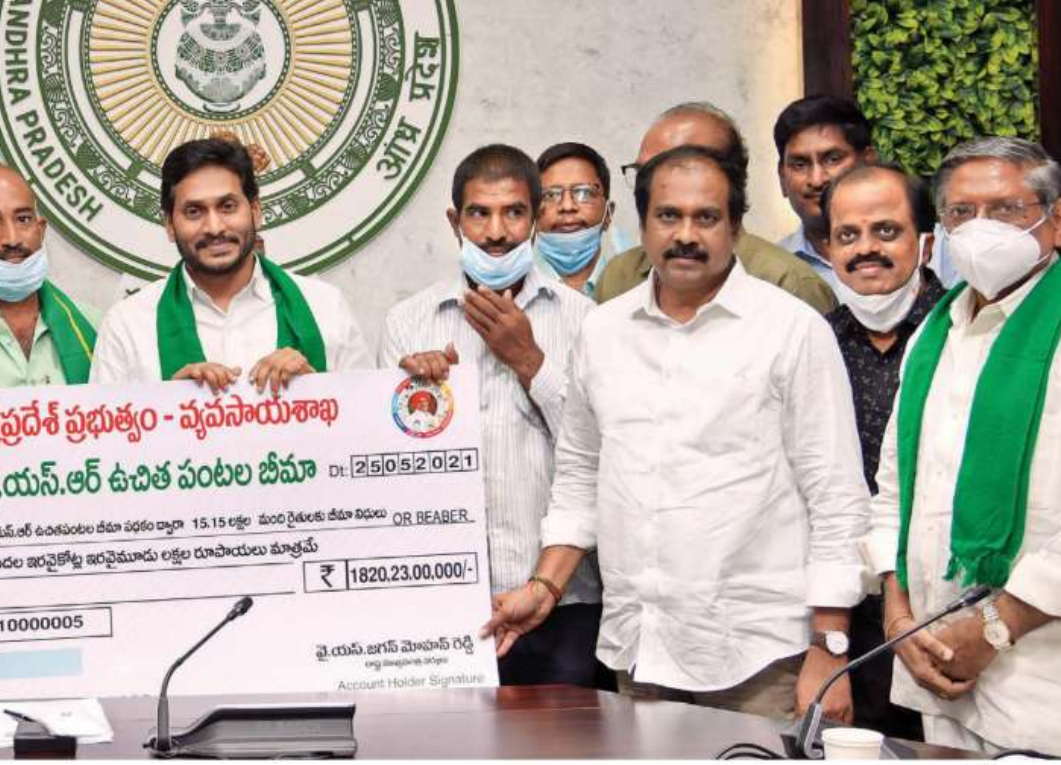
CHEQUE THAT CM Jagan Reddy credits Rs 1,820.23 crore to the bank accounts of 1.5 mn farmers as part of the 'YSR Free Crop Insurance' scheme

ANDHRA PRADESH CHIEF minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy had added one more pledge to his pre-poll promises when he took charge in May 2019—that he would replace his cabinet colleagues midway through the five-year term and dispatch them for party work. So, with the November 30 deadline lapsing, there is anxiety in his Yuvajana Sramika Rythu Congress (YSRC) about the impending reshuffle. Sources say a few of the five deputy chief ministers and 20 other ministers may be retained so that the changeover does not deliver any rude shocks to the governance engine. The reshuffle, expected in mid-January, is still in the works, and is poised to be a defining moment for Jagan. Even more so considering that the YSRC as a political party does not have an internal governance mechanism.

However, dissent seems unlikely in a party that has 151 MLAs in the 175-seat legislative assembly. The YSRC has also been on a winning spree since the assembly win, securing overwhelming majorities in elections at every level. The party won 22 out of the 25 Lok Sabha seats in the 2019 parliamentary election and all 12 municipal corporations and 74 of the 75 municipalities and nagar panchayats in March 2021. In September, the party captured all 13 zilla parishads (ZPs), the first time a ruling party has done so in the state, and over 90 per cent of the MPTCs or the mandal parishad territorial constituencies.

The main opposition, the Telugu Desam Party (TDP), has been decimated, unable to reach even double digits in any of the zilla parishads. "The poll outcomes show that conspiracies and lies will fail when a government takes care of its people and their necessities," says Sajjala Ramakrishna Reddy, advisor (public affairs) to the chief minister. In November, the YSRC scored a major electoral triumph in the Kuppam municipality poll, winning 19 of the 25 wards in the heart of TDP chief N. Chandrababu Naidu's assembly constituency in Chittoor district. The debacle is a huge loss of face. Kuppam has been Naidu's bastion since 1989 when he won the assembly seat for the first time. Though he won the seat again in 2019, the TDP has fared so poorly in all the polls thereafter that a bounceback before the next election looks improbable.

The electoral triumphs reveal the remarkable support Jagan has elicited from the people for his populist welfare measures (even as the state reels from a massive financial crunch). In keeping with his pre-poll promises, Jagan has launched numerous schemes (see *Grants Galore*) named after his late father and united Andhra Pradesh chief



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THE WELFARE BONANZA IS IN KEEPING WITH THE SATURATION CONCEPT ENVISAGED BY YSR TO COVER ALL DISADVANTAGED FAMILIES WITH ONE SCHEME OR ANOTHER. THE COST IS HUGE BUT IT HASN'T DETERRED JAGAN

minister Y.S. Rajasekhara Reddy (popularly known as YSR) and himself. Implementing the welfare bonanza is in keeping with the saturation coverage first envisaged by YSR to shower all disadvantaged families with one scheme or another. The cost is humongous, but it has not deterred Jagan.

"Our chief minister is clear that implementing welfare measures and investing in human capital will be priority, whatever the cost. We'll develop infrastructure aggressively in the next term," says finance minister B. Rajendranath Reddy. "We lost five years after the state reorganisation (in 2014). Naidu did not plan quick decentralised development and left the state nearly bankrupt."

₹33,140.6 CRORE

The revenue deficit in the first half of FY22, an unprecedented increase of 662.8 per cent; fiscal deficit was up by 107.8 per cent

FINANCIAL DISTRESS

YSRC'S BINGE OF WELFARE MEASURES MAY BE A vote-grabber but it has also left the state with a severe cash crunch. Raising revenues internally as well as attracting investments are proving to be a daunting task. A desperate Jagan has been asking the Centre and contiguous states to clear all pending payments. Rajendranath says this includes Rs 6,300 crore in electricity arrears, revenue deficit grants, the cost of the multi-purpose Polavaram project, rational allocation of rice for the PDS by the Centre, the arrears due from Tamil Nadu for the Telugu Ganga project, defreezing of fixed deposit accounts and division of assets with Telangana, and arrears from Telangana after the state reorganisation. Meanwhile, the state has availed a Rs 25,000 crore loan through the Andhra Pradesh State Development Corporation (APSDC). The TDP has questioned the constitutional validity of the APSDC and the manner in which it has sought to mobilise funds to implement various schemes.

The state is tapping every resource to meet even routine expenses. Such is the distress that on November 9, the state took another Rs 1,000 crore loan from the Reserve Bank of India by availing security

GRANTS GALORE

CM Jagan Reddy has rolled out 30-odd direct benefit transfer (DBT) schemes. Most are wholly state-sponsored, some like the YSR Rythu Bharosa have a central component. Several are in his own name and the rest after his father YSR. The bonanza includes total writeoffs in keeping with his pre-poll promises. A staggering 66,116,074 beneficiaries have got a total of Rs 1.14 lakh crore since the YSRC came to power in June 2019. Some of the big ticket schemes include...

FLAGSHIP SCHEMES

YSR PENSION KANUKA

A social security monthly pension of Rs 2,250 to the old, widows, toddy tappers, weavers, single destitute women, fishermen, HIV positive patients, traditional cobblers; Rs 3,000 a month to the disabled, transgender and traditional folk artists; Rs 10,000 a month to those affected by chronic kidney disease for treatment at government or private dialysis facilities

Beneficiaries 6,172,964; Spend Rs 36,830.71 cr

YSR RYTHU BHAROSA

Investment support of Rs 13,500 a year to farmers, including tenant ones and those cultivating forest/assigned lands. Includes Rs 6,000 given by the Union government under PM Kisan.

Beneficiaries 5,238,000; Spend Rs 17,029.88 cr

WOMEN

YSR AASARA

Clear the total loan outstanding of Rs 27,168 crore as on April 11, 2019 of members of the women's self-help groups across the state in four tranches deposited into their bank accounts

Beneficiaries 7,875,539; Spend Rs 12,750.20 cr

YSR CHEYUTHA

Rs 75,000 at Rs 18,750 a year over four years to eligible women in the 45-60 age group belonging to the SC, ST, BC and minority communities

Beneficiaries 2,455,534; Spend Rs 8,943.53 cr

YSR KAPU NESTHAM

Rs 15, 000 a year for five years to women in the 45-60 age group belonging to the Kapu, Balija, Telaga and Ontari communities

Beneficiaries 327,349; Spend Rs 981.68 cr

YOUTH

JAGANANNA AMMAVODI

Rs 15,000 a year to poor and needy mothers for the education of their children from Class 1 to the Plus Two intermediate level

Beneficiaries 4,448,865; Spend Rs 13,022.93 cr.

JAGANANNA VIDYA DEEVENA

Full fee reimbursement for poor students pursuing higher education; money is credited to the mother's account in four instalments

Beneficiaries 1,880,934; Spend Rs 5,573 .12 cr

JAGANANNA VASATI DEEVENA

Rs 20,000 a year for poor students at all government-aided and private colleges pursuing courses ranging from industrial training to post graduate programmes, credited to their mother's account to meet costs of meals and accommodation

Beneficiaries 1,556,956; Spend Rs 2,289.93 cr

JAGANANNA VIDYA KANUKA

Students in grades one to 10 in state-aided schools are provided with bilingual textbooks and school materia, three pairs of uniform fabric with tailoring costs, a pair of shoes, two pairs of socks, a belt, a school bag and the Oxford English dictionary at the start of the academic year.

Beneficiaries 4,732,064; Spend Rs 1,380 cr

FARMERS

YSR FREE CROP INSURANCE SCHEME

Cover for all 30 notified crops for all farmers

Beneficiaries 3,106,641; Spend Rs 3,788.25 cr

YSR SUNNA VADDI PANTA RUNALU

Reimbursement of four per cent interest subsidy on crop loans up to Rs 1 lakh for a crop season

Beneficiaries 5,896,994; Spend Rs 1,105.89 cr

INPUT SUBSIDY TO FARMERS

Relief for crop loss due to any notified calamity

Beneficiaries 1,370,881; Spend Rs 1,055.19 cr

HEALTH

DR YSR AROGYASRI

Treatment free of cost for 2,434 illnesses, including cancer, for the poor; covers 95 per cent of the 15 million families in the state

Beneficiaries 13,74,087; Spend Rs 4,828.67 cr

DR YSR AROGYA AASARA

Rs 225 a day or Rs 5,000 a month to poor patients for post-surgical care

Beneficiaries 466,234; Spend Rs 282.08 cr

Graphic by TANMOY CHAKRABORTY

OTHER DISADVANTAGED GROUPS

YSR BIMA

Grant to families of unorganised workers in the event of accidental death or disability

Beneficiaries 103,171; Spend Rs 1,681.93 cr

SPECIAL COVID AID

Rs 10,000 to all white card holders to cope with the hardships posed by the Covid-19 pandemic

Beneficiaries 13,505,338; Spend Rs 1350.53 cr

AGRIGOLD

Rs 10,000-20,000 as a mitigating measure to small depositors in the Agrigold deposit scheme that went bust

Beneficiaries 1,040,000; Spend Rs 905.57 cr

JAGANANNA THODU

Rs 10,000 interest-free loan through banks to poor traders, cart traders and traditional artisans to meet their financial needs

Beneficiaries 905,458; Spend Rs 905 cr

YSR VAHANA MITRA

Rs 10,000 a year to self-owned autorickshaw, taxi and maxi cab drivers for upkeep of their vehicle

Beneficiaries 274,015; Spend Rs 762.42 cr

YSR NETHANNA NESTHAM

Rs 24,000 a year to every eligible handloom weaver's family owning a loom

Beneficiaries 81,703; Spend Rs 575.67 cr

YSR MATSYAKARA BHAROSA

Rs 10,000 a year to fishermen families during the fishing ban period

Beneficiaries 119,875 ; Spend Rs 331.58 cr

JAGANANNA CHEDODU

Rs 10,000 a year towards investment for washermen, barbers and tailors who lost livelihood opportunities because of the Covid pandemic

Beneficiaries 298,428; Spend Rs 298.43 cr

PRIESTS, IMAMS AND PASTORS SCHEME

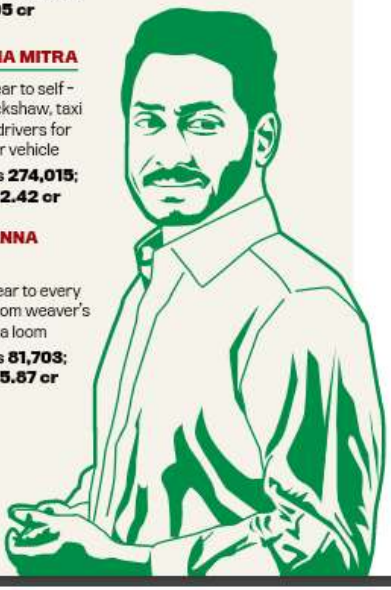
Rs 5,000 as a one-time grant to priests of all religious persuasions in view of the adverse impact of Covid-19

Beneficiaries 77,290; Spend Rs 37.71 cr

YSR LAW NESTHAM

Rs 5,000 a month as stipend for first three years to junior lawyers starting out

Beneficiaries 2,012; Spend Rs 13.08 cr



bonds at auction at a seven per cent interest (higher than the bids of four other states). State government employees and pensioners are a restive lot after the delays in salaries and pensions. To win over government staff, Jagan announced a fitment of 23 per cent (against the recommended 14.3 per cent) in their earnings on January 7, and showered a slew of other gains, including housing plots, compassionate appointments and clearing of pending dearness allowances. This will cost the already cash-strapped government another Rs 10,247 crore a year. Jagan Mohan has also raised the retirement age to 62 from 60. Despite this, the employees are threatening a strike from February 7.

"The slide started in 2018 with Naidu's Rs 9,400 crore Pasupu Kumkuma scheme, which provided a grant of Rs 10,000 each to women in self-help groups," rues former revenue minister D.L. Ravindra Reddy. "The state is heading towards bankruptcy. We spend every paisa on revenue expenditure (expenses to meet ongoing operational costs) when at least 30 per cent of the funds should be earmarked for capital expenditure and asset building."

In the first half of the 2021-22 financial year, revenue deficit rose by an unprecedented 662.8 per cent while the fiscal deficit climbed up by 107.8 per cent. The state had projected a revenue deficit of Rs 5,000.1 crore fo the year butit shot up to Rs 33,140.6 crore in the April-September period itself. About half of the total earnings of Rs 1.05 lakh crore have been used for welfare schemes, according to the CAG accounts for the first half of the year. This is more than the Rs 48,083.9 crore Rajendranath's budget had provisioned for the whole year, and includes Rs 39,914.2 crore in borrowings (which have also breached the target for the whole year). Analysts say the state is shifting goalposts to cover up the crisis. On November 26, the Jagan government amended the Fiscal Responsbility and Budget Management (FRBM) Act, 2005, to enable enhanced borrowings and also allow a larger revenue deficit. "Covid-19 has caused a substantial reduction in realisation of revenues. Horizontal devolution of central transfers has also reduced in the 15th Finance Commission award. These constraints compounded our fiscal stress," says Rajendranath, justifying the amendments to the FRBM Act. Yanamala Ramakrishnudu, former finance minister and leader of the opposition in the state legislative council, wants "a thorough probe into the reckless spending".

DEEPENING CRISIS

THE YSRC HAS TAKEN REVENUE expenditure to unprecedented levels. A staggering 66.12 million beneficiaries have got a total of Rs 1.12 lakh crore through the slew of direct benefit transfer (DBT) schemes and doles since June 2019. And Jagan is still tweaking welfare schemes based on feedback. The Jagananna Vidya Deevena, aimed at reimbursing the fees of poor students, has led to increasing

reports about mothers defaulting on payments. So, notices have been sent to errant mothers saying only those making payments to colleges in time will get the next tranche. Implementation of the slew of welfare schemes is tracked through the elaborate village and ward secretariat network by the 11,162 village and 3,842 ward secretariats in urban areas.

Education and health initiatives remain major concerns on Jagan's welfare agenda. Between June 2019 and October 2021, as many as 1,374,087 persons availed treatment through YSR Arogyasri, costing the state Rs 4,828.7 crore. About 93 per cent families in the state enjoy its benefits as eligibility now covers those with annual incomes of up to Rs 5 lakh.

Analysts point out how the majority of the welfare schemes are without concomitant development in the form of investments that could create jobs. Uncertainty over the tri-capital plan with Visakhapatnam, Amaravati and Kurnool as the nodes has also become a deterrent for potential investors wary of legal wrangles. "We are witness to the most egregious financial indiscipline ever seen in the history of India," says a retired bureaucrat. Analysts also say that in the past year, the YSRC government has taken loans that were equal to the total amount of loans availed by the previous government and suggest the government should come clean with a white paper on the finances in view of the alarming reports that it has taken loans in violation of rules and in excess of the FRBM. Banks and financial institutions are now reluctant to lend to the state unless assets are mortgaged.

THE LONG GAME

MUDDYING THE WATERS IS THE political acrimony between the YSRC and TDP which shows no sign of abating. It touched a new low on October 19 when TDP leaders, including party spokesperson Kommareddy Pattabhiram, used the choicest expletives against Jagan and the YSRC. In a swift payback, YSRC cadre stormed the TDP headquarters and ransacked it to show their might even as the police arrested Pattabhiram for abusing constitutional authorities. A peeved Naidu then sat on a 36-hour strike at the party headquarters before petitioning President Ram Nath Kovind to declare President's rule in Andhra Pradesh. The YSRC, in a counter-petition, asked the President to derecognise the TDP "for its failure to maintain decency and decorum in public life...." The latest in this unsavoury battle had Naidu breaking down at a media conference and declaring that he will boycott the assembly for the rest of Jagan's term. Political commentator K. Nageshwar says, "Jagan has a huge mandate that could have been used to focus on governance. Instead, the YSRC is unnecessarily indulging in acrimony and controversies."

Some critics argue that this is all part of Jagan's strategy to destroy his rivals. "His is a highly centralised, intolerant and one-sided style of governance and this attempt to implement such unsustainable electoral promises will ruin the state," says former Andhra Pradesh chief secretary

TEARS FOR FEARS Opposition leader and TDP chief Naidu breaks down at a press meet

ANI

ANALYSTS POINT OUT THAT IN THE PAST YEAR, THE YSRC GOVERNMENT HAS ALREADY TAKEN LOANS EQUAL TO THE TOTAL AMOUNT AVAILED BY THE PREVIOUS REGIME AND SUGGEST IT COME CLEAN WITH A WHITE PAPER ON THE STATE'S FINANCES

and now BJP activist I.Y.R. Krishna Rao. Others believe that Jagan, who turns 50 on December 21, has a strongman's clarity of purpose. "He is pretty much a single man army, very much his own man. He has a sharp memory, particularly for numbers. Jagan's goal is to remain in power for a long time, enrich himself as well as those who have been with him, while also keeping the vote bank intact and stifling the opposition," says a bureaucrat who has watched him closely. Seldom does he consult cabinet colleagues or even his appointed advisors. Only party MP V. Vijaya Sai Reddy, Sajjala Ramakrishna and Jagan's maternal uncle Y.V. Subba Reddy, who has now got a second term as chairman of the Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD), are known to have his ear.

Meanwhile, Jagan has no dearth of plans for the state, the latest being reorganising the districts to almost double their number—13 to 25. This implies making fresh promises even as some post-poll ones like the opening of new medical colleges in each existing district along with a super specialty hospital have made little headway beyond Jagan virtually laying the foundation stones simultaneously. ■

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TARUN BHATIA

Bringing *Positivity Indoors*

Transform your interiors into a happy, positive space with these quick and simple tips

By **RIDHI KALE**

With Covid-related anxiety and a return to work from home, it is natural to get overwhelmed. In such times, brightening up your home can bring in some positive vibes. Experts from the décor and design industry give five simple tips on how to bring happiness home.

Make it green

"Plants can instil an invigorating feeling in any space. Sculptural indoor planters or organically made ones can become stunning accessories," says Astha Khetan, founder, The House of Things, a décor and design company.

Set the table

Often in times of distress, your appetite takes a hit. A good way to bring focus back on food is by throwing yourself a feast. "Pull out your best tableware. We set aside our prized tableware for special occasions, but using it on a day you and your family are feeling blue is bound to make you feel special," says Sonal Jetha, founder, Kaunteya, a luxury tableware brand.

Use accessories

"Sometimes, just moving your accessories around can work magic in a space, and in your mood. Whether it's gold-finished candle holders or just some coasters, accessories can add extra sparkle to any space," says Mansi Dalal, founder, Serein Decor.

Fancy fabrics

"Bright and light curtains can bring natural light into a space and energise it. And for a cosier feel, go with colourful cushions," says Rohit Khemka, founder, RR Décor, a furnishings brand. You can go with geometric prints for a modern look or a floral motif to bring the outdoors in. Embroidered beauties are timeless options too.

So, what are you waiting for? Get decorating! ■

Happiness Quest: *A joint enterprise of India Today and the RPG Group celebrating exemplary initiatives to spread happiness*

What makes me *happy*

G.V. PRASAD

Chairman & Managing Director, Dr Reddy's Laboratories

HAPPINESS MANTRA

1. Finding purpose and meaning in the work I do—it is the only way to realise your full potential and be happy;
2. Cultivating meaningful relationships—it is not about the number but the depth of relationships with family, close friends and colleagues who understand and accept you with all your quirks, defects and gifts;
3. Valuing peace of mind—follow your conscience and commit to the right thing;
4. Appreciating natural beauty—taking breaks amid forests, mountains and rivers can be joyful and rejuvenating;
5. Never forgetting the importance of good health and high energy in enabling all of these.

TASNIM MIR: BRIGHTENING INDIA'S FUTURE PG 53

LEISURE

SAMAY RAINA: GAME CHANGER PG 54

TOVINO THOMAS: KEEPING US GUESSING PG 56

Q&A WITH ANANYA PANDAY PG 58

SPORTS

'NOBODY CAN STOP HIM'

WINNER OF THIS YEAR'S INDIA OPEN, SHUTTLER **LAKSHYA SEN** IS SMASHING HIS WAY TO THE TOP

LAKSHYA SEN is currently ranked #13 in the world. The next three years will be crucial for the shuttler

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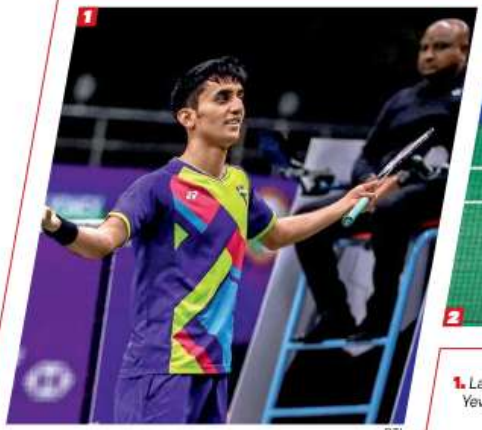

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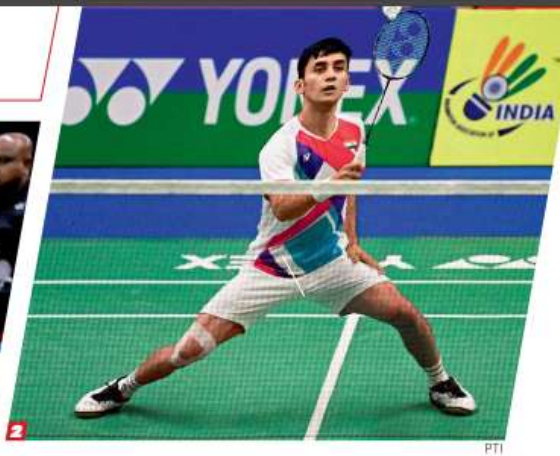

PTI

1. *Lakshya Sen celebrates after defeating World Champion Loh Kean Yew in the men's singles final match at the India Open 2022, Jan. 16*
2. *Sen plays a shot against Loh Kean Yew at the India Open 2022 tournament*

Watching shuttler Lakshya Sen play can, at times, feel like watching a b-boy pulling off unbelievable moves. He will dive to retrieve a seemingly unreturnable shuttle and then quickly bounce back up to prolong the rally. You will gasp at his ability to switch from defence to offence. You might also wince, seeing what he is putting his body through. As he revisits his matches, Sen realises the risks he takes as he pushes himself. "There are chances of injury in shots where I throw myself on the court. I want to do it only when it is required and be more stable on my feet," he says. "But there's so much happening that you are not thinking, and then they turn into amazing rallies."

In the past two months, his inarguably exciting game has paid rich dividends for the 20-year-old. Sen won a bronze at his maiden World Championships as a senior in December. He recently bagged the India Open title in New Delhi, where he beat world champion Loh Kean Yew in the finals. Suddenly, the new kid on the block is in the spotlight. "It is great that people have been talking about me. I like the attention," says Sen. "But I just want to continue to perform at the highest level."

Sen is no overnight sensation though. A decade's work has gone into moulding him for the big stage. It was, perhaps, destined that the boy from Almora would pick up the racquet much like his grandfather, Chandra Lal, and father, Dhirendra Kumar Sen, had. "He was an intelligent kid who grasped [things] quickly," says Lakshya's father and coach, D.K. Sen. "My father used to say, 'make him a doctor'. Then he would see him play and say, 'He plays well, too.'" D.K. Sen saw his son had a spark but wondered if it was parental bias that made him see Lakshya as special.

In 2010, D.K. Sen travelled to the Prakash Padukone Badminton Academy (PPBA) in Bengaluru with his elder son Chirag and Lakshya. He asked coach Vimal Kumar for an "objective point of view" on Lakshya's talent. He didn't tell Kumar the boy was his son. "I could see that he was also impressed with his game," says D.K. Sen, who would soon send both his sons—aged 13 and 10, respectively—to PPBA for training.

Lakshya Sen used the lockdown to improve his stamina—playing basketball and football to improve his endurance

Lakshya's talent soon caught Padukone's eye. In 2017, Padukone, in an interview to ESPN.com, said, "I felt [Lakshya] had some very special qualities from the very beginning. The idea now is to help him keep developing tactically. I see my job as the one posing the questions, making him come up with the answers and I find he is faster at that than other players." The faith shown by Padukone and Kumar resulted in the Olympic Gold Quest (OGQ) investing in Sen since he was 11 years old. Sen delivered. After becoming the youngest to reach the national men's singles final at the age of 15 in 2017, beating Padukone's record in the process, he became the second Indian shuttler to win the Asia Junior Championships a year later. He followed this up with a silver at the 2018 Youth Olympics and bronze at the World Junior Championships.

No Indian male badminton player has won an Olympic medal. The pandemic spoilt Sen's plans to qualify for Tokyo 2020 as the international badminton calendar was severely disrupted in 2020-21. "For the Olympics [2020], I was not putting expectations on myself," says Sen, who began playing on the senior circuit only in 2019. He used the lockdown to improve his stamina. Post on-court and gym training, Sen played basketball and football to improve

his endurance. Playing three-set-long matches and 50+ shot rallies is no longer as draining as it once was. "Post Olympics, I knew players are going to take it easy, some may retire or take an off, so my plan was to use the time to get into the top 15," he says. Sen is currently ranked #13 in the world.

Former hockey captain Viren Rasquinha, also CEO of OGQ, recently said that the next three years "will be the most important" of Sen's career. Since P.V. Sindhu will be 29 by the 2024 Paris Games, and Kidambi Srikanth, world silver medallist and currently India's highest ranked male player, 31, hopes are pinned on Sen to ensure India bags a medal like in the past three editions. Sen, though, is taking it one step at a time. "Playing in big tournaments like Asian Games will help me gain experience to play the Olympics in three years' time," he says.

He has the right people rallying for him. In December 2021, South Korean doubles specialist and Olympic medallist Yoo Yong-sung was appointed coach at PPBA. In 2018, D.K. Sen took voluntary retirement from his job as a coach at the Sports Authority of India, Almora, and moved to Bengaluru where he, too, took up a job as coach at the PPBA. With the kids having moved in with the family, D.K. Sen now ensures they get "*mummy ke haath ka khaana*" and spend limited time on their mobiles. "He needs to raise his fitness level so he can play against the retrievers," he says. "He would earlier attack a lot, now he is more patient and lets the rally unfold and then attack. If he can improve his attack, nobody can stop him." ■

–Suhani Singh

BRIGHTENING INDIA'S FUTURE

Grit and sacrifice have made possible Tasnim Mir's climb to the top of badminton's world U-19 rankings

Towards the end of last year, Tasnim Mir had a tough decision on her hands. She had turned 16 in May and had three more years to play on the junior circuit. At the same time, she thought it was the right moment to transition to the big league, in order to hone her skills against senior players. Through August and September, Mir played four international tournaments. She finished as the under-19 singles champion in Bulgaria, France and Belgium. The results convinced the then junior World No. 2 to aim higher. But there was, thankfully, a surprise in store for her last week.

Mir had just wrapped up her training session when her mother, Asma, informed her that as per the latest rankings, she was now the junior World No. 1. "It was completely unexpected. The rankings had been frozen due to Covid and I soon started playing on the senior circuit, so I didn't think I would make it to the top. But it was certainly something that I had thought of back when I started competing regularly," Mir says.

Mehsana in Gujarat, where Mir grew up, is best known for its many water parks. As a child, Mir remembers cooling off at these facilities during the summers. But those trips tapered off once she became a regular at the local badminton court. Her father, Irfan, gradually pushed her into a routine of sorts, doubling up as her first coach. The spark in her was evident when she was crowned the under-13 state champion, even before she hit her teens. "I started skipping classes to dedicate more time to training. Even today, I don't have thick friends. We also didn't take many vacations as a family. All our efforts were focused on badminton," Mir says.

At her first national championship, aged 11, she was spotted by Pullela Gopichand, who invited her to train at his academy in Hyderabad. Ever since, the family has lived separately so that Mir can chase her dream. "My father would look after my younger brother in Mehsana, while my mother travels with me. It isn't just me who has made sacrifices," she says.

In December 2017, she shifted base to the Assam Badminton Academy in Guwahati to train under Edwin Iriawan, an Indonesian coach, who has worked with the Indian national team in the past. Under the doubles specialist, Mir also started playing mixed doubles with her partner, Ayan Rashid. Her first international triumph came at the Dubai International Series in 2019. After two other titles, Covid brought a halt to her progress. She took the time to finish her Class 10 examination. "I stopped going to school from Class 7. All my studies have been online since."

These days, her brother, Mohammed Ali, also a promising shuttler, has shifted base to Guwahati to train at the academy. It has brought the family closer, though her father still works in Mehsana. "We chat over the phone every day. My father is still very involved with my game. We know that I have got a long way to go to be among the best," she says. ■

–Shail Desai

NOW 16, JUNIOR BADMINTON STAR TASNIM MIR IS TRANSITIONING TO THE BIG LEAGUE AND HONING HER SKILLS AGAINST SENIOR PLAYERS

ENTERTAINMENT

GAME CHANGER

On stand-up comic **Samay Raina's** *YouTube channel, his fellow comedians take on chess grandmasters*

In 2019, Samay Raina, 21, jointly won the second season of *Comicstaan*, Amazon Prime Video's popular standup reality competition. In 2020, he won the internet.

As the surge of a deadly pandemic halted lives—erasing any possibility of stage time for stand-up comedians across the globe—Raina started a YouTube channel. To play chess. He live-streamed the games, pairing Indian comedians opposite grandmasters like Vidit Gurajthi, Vishwanathan Anand and Teimour Radjabov. It was a sort of online chess tournament that gave an unlikely makeover to the reputation of the sport. "The perception about chess has always been that chess players are boring or strict," says Raina, an avid chess enthusiast. "I don't think Indians ever got a chance to see how fun chess can be. Everyone thinks of it only as a game of intelligence." The comedian's livestreams didn't only make the game more accessible to the public, they also changed the general assumptions about the game once "people got a chance to interact with grandmasters". The success rate of Raina's chess experiment is evident in his digital ascension: in under a year, his YouTube channel has grossed over 835,000 subscribers, and hundreds of people log in daily to watch his livestreams.

Raina doesn't seem surprised. For him, stand-up and the world of online streaming aren't much different. "In stand-up, when you crack a good joke, you get a laugh. On streaming, you crack a joke and get a laugh emoji," Raina says. "No one needs to buy a ticket or travel to see you, so the pressure to come prepared with jokes is a lot less."

By his own admission, live-streaming for an entire year has helped free him as a comedian. "The few times that I got to perform on stage when things had opened up, I felt more chilled out." Still, he admits that all of it is moot if a comedian isn't authentic. "You can write 5-10 minutes of material as someone you want to be. But that's about it. Real comedy comes from the place of being true to yourself."

In Raina's case, that has meant carving out a distinct voice. His brand of observational comedy is sharp and economical. Even then, being a stand-up comedian is never easy. For one, the metrics of success are never the same. "It doesn't necessarily mean that just because you're a good comedian, you'll be guaranteed a streaming audience. Or that if you're a good streamer, you will have people buying tickets to the show," he says. It says something that Raina is possibly one of the few Indian comedians who has managed the feat of ensuring people come to his show as well as tune into his live streams. "I'm in a happy place," he says. ■

–Poulomi Das

ENTERTAINMENT

SINGING A DIFFERENT TUNE

Aakash Mehta *wanted to be a musician when he was in school. He studied law in college instead, topping it off with a diploma in audio engineering as consolation. Eventually, Mehta found his calling as a stand-up comedian. Ten years into a comedy career, the 28-year-old can boast of 601,000 subscribers on YouTube and regularly sells out shows across Indian cities. Still, even as he diversified into podcasting and writing, music remained at the back of Mehta's mind. This month, life came full circle when the comedian released* What a Life, *his debut music album.*

Q. As an artist whose craft exists at the intersection of sold tickets and internet views, how do you measure success?

Success is getting better at the craft. I became a comic to write and tell jokes, so it doesn't matter how many tickets I sell or how many views I get. It's about making the most of that time people are giving me by becoming the best I can be at what they have come to see.

"THERE ARE SOME THINGS BETTER SAID IN A SONG, SOME BETTER SAID THROUGH JOKES"

Q. Ten years into stand-up comedy, are there any changes that you have noticed in how comedians approach the art form?

We live in a time of influencers. Not enough people pay attention to the craft anymore because brand deals are more lucrative. The end result is that comics tend to be not as good on stage and are far more likely to not touch anything that could damage the ability to get brand work.

Q. 'What a Life', the title track feels like the album's sweeping ballad, equal parts melancholic and joyful. Was it always meant to have the spoken-word interlude in between?

When I wrote [the song], it was just the two verses, but as we jammed, the song took us to this completely other space. That's where the voice note idea was born. It felt like the whole band and I were saying things previously left unsaid as we played.

Q. How exactly do you mould your way of expressing yourself as an artist when you are recording a music album and then, when you are doing a comedy set on stage?

Art is elevating craft to the point where you can express something in a way that makes people who encounter your creation feel something. There are things better said in song, things better said through jokes. But here is my rule of thumb—comedy comes with the caveat of a funny ending, music need not have one. ■

—with Poulomi Das

THE PUNCH LINE

WHAT'S IT LIKE TO BE A STAND-UP COMIC IN INDIA?

"It isn't ideal to be a stand-up comedian in India the way it is in the West. There's not much money in it unless you're going viral. What comes your way, instead, is outrage. It's as if people forget that political satire existed in India even before stand-up comedy."

-MUNAWAR FARUQUI

"You can't be in stand-up comedy in India today without having a great lawyer. But having said that, being a comedian means knowing the difference between joking about oppressors as opposed to cracking jokes that feed into stereotypes"

-AGRIMA JOSHUA

"To be a stand-up comedian in this eventful phase of India is a rare privilege. It's a creatively satisfying pursuit, one that shouldn't come with the many occupational hazards"

-ANIRBAN DASGUPTA

CINEMA

KEEPING US GUESSING

The new superhero film Minnal Murali *has added to* ***Tovino Thomas's*** *reputation as a performer who keeps experimenting*

Tovino Thomas is, to put it mildly, a good-looking man with considerable screen presence. But that in itself doesn't account for the important part he is playing in the Malayalam cinema renaissance. What is more notable is that Tovino's best work gets its tension from the contrast between his hunky charm, and a vulnerability—or even unlikability—in his characters.

Some fine films—two recent examples being *Kala* (2021), which he also co-produced, and *Kaanekkaane* (2021)—have used this dichotomy to terrific effect. In both, Tovino's personality and physical appearance help subvert a narrative, or keep us guessing. In *Kala*, the stylised early sequences, including a lovemaking scene, suggest that his feral character Shaji is the protagonist. But Shaji loses much of his self-assurance and we see him in a different light. In *Kaanekkaane*, as a man whose wife died in an accident, Tovino looks lost and distracted, then shows heartfelt emotion—but much suspense hinges on the possibility that the character is a philanderer who lied to his ex-father-in-law; so what else might he be capable of?

TOVINO THOMAS'S BEST WORK GETS ITS TENSION FROM THE CONTRAST BETWEEN HIS HUNKY CHARM AND HIS CHARACTERS' VULNERABILITY

"I have to be entertained by what I'm doing," Tovino tells us during a phone interview. "Money and fame should only be the byproducts of me pushing my limits." This is also why he tries to change his appearance from one role to the next, and enthusiastically tells us to watch the trailer of his upcoming film *Naaradan*: "I have a new look there."

Different sides of his persona are also on view in *Minnal Murali*, the acclaimed new superhero film where he plays Jaison, a small-town tailor transformed after a lightning strike. The story moves towards a climax where Tovino strikes a heroic pose in his custom-fitted costume, but long before that, we see a man-child who sulks and mumbles "I deserve a better life!" to himself. "I enjoyed playing the many shades of Jaison—from a self-

HIS MANY FACES
(clockwise from left) Tovino Thomas; the actor in *Minnal Murali*; and in *Kala*

centred, juvenile guy to someone who becomes selfless," says Tovino. "It's a gradual change, and I had to think like the character: if someone like him gets a superpower, he won't go out and start saving people immediately, he will just be excited. To show him evolving, that's what made it worthwhile as an actor."

The setting is atypical for the genre, and the story builds in mundane, unglamorous ways: Jaison tests his powers by juggling kitchen utensils; clumsily, he discovers that flying is not one of his new gifts. In one scene, Tovino—named the most desirable man from Kerala in a 2018 listing—even appears to send up his image as a style icon: wearing an "Abibas" shirt, he goes "Stylish, right?" It's one of many scenes that make *Minnal Murali* an unusual and charming superhero movie.

It's clear that director Basil Joseph and Tovino set out to make the film very rooted. "That came naturally. Basil and I are small-town boys. I did *Godha* (2017) with him, we became good friends; I can see it on his face when I give a good performance. Also, we both have kids inside us. We don't want to grow up!" With their budgets, they couldn't do a Marvel-style film anyway, he adds—"and you can't have superheroes flying around skyscrapers in Kerala. We wanted it to be relatable, so even the transformation is caused by a natural force. We used practical effects instead of VFX, and emphasised emotions and character development, which is what Malayalam cinema is known for."

Equally central to *Minnal Murali's* old-world charm is that it isn't set in a technology-saturated present. This is made clear by the wall posters and a *Chitrahaar* reference. "We thought of it as unfolding in 1994-95. It would have been a very different film if it had mobile phones or the internet."

Joseph and Tovino, though, don't want to be rigid when making future *Minnal Murali* films. "We passed the first exam, the character's origin story—after this we can take more liberties, maybe change the setting." Tovino also hopes the film will get more viewers interested in Malayalam movies. "We in Kerala watch French and Korean movies, so why can't people watch our work?" ■

–Jai Arjun Singh

GUARDIANS OF OUR GALAXY

Indian superhero movies down the years

SUPERMAN
(1987)
Before playing Duryodhana on TV, Puneet Issar played the title role in this entertaining B-movie, a rip-off of the Christopher Reeve *Superman*. With Dharmendra as the Jor-El character, declaring "*Yeh dharti meri maa hai*" as his planet is about to blow up!

KRRISH 3
(2013)
Arguably the most enjoyable entry in the "Krrish franchise" that began with *Koi Mil Gaya*, this film gets much of its energy from Hrithik Roshan—one of our most superhero-appropriate stars—fully inhabiting the title role.

A FLYING JATT
(2016)
This sweet-natured film about a Sikh superman (played by Tiger Shroff) could have been more fun if it had stuck with its initially goofy tone throughout, instead of trying to replicate every trope of the western superhero film.

Q+A

COMING INTO HER OWN

IN THE PAST THREE YEARS, **ANANYA PANDAY** HAS RECEIVED HER SHARE OF OPPORTUNITIES, BUT IT'S ONLY NOW THAT FILMS LIKE *GEHRAIYAAN* ARE TESTING HER METTLE AS AN ACTOR

Q. Would it be fair to say *Gehraiyaan* has given you the most layered part till now?

I think, emotionally, Tia is my most fleshed out character. Now that I have tasted blood and know what it feels like to surrender to a character, I hope I get more roles like this. It's cool to see women who are strong, complex and flawed, who are not judged by the filmmaker and, hopefully, the audience.

Q. Given *Gehraiyaan*'s adult rating, do you think it is likely to find a wider audience on streaming?

Gehraiyaan is a film that you can enjoy at home, reflect upon and then talk to a friend about. I'm happy it's releasing on Amazon Prime. OTT gives you the option of switching off something you don't like. At least we know people will try watching it.

Q. Infidelity forms the core of this relationship drama. How did you get into Tia's head?

I had to borrow a lot from myself. I haven't been cheated on, but I do have some of Tia's personality traits. I am insecure as a person and when I'm in a relationship. Tia is very loyal, loving and dependent on her partner. In some small ways, I do possess these qualities. I need to work on that.

Q. Your childhood friends Shanaya [Kapoor] and Suhana [Khan], too, are set to become actors. Any advice for them?

Ours was a collective dream to become actors. Shanaya, especially, turns to me whenever confused. I try not to give too much *gyaan*. I tell them about my experiences, but I want them to have their own lovely experiences.

–with Suhani Singh

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COCKTAILS
PLANT-BASED MIXOLOGY

Dancing to her own tune

Actress Taapsee Pannu's career choices have turned the formula on its head

Taapsee Pannu stars in *Looop Lapeta* that drops on Netflix next month

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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

THE QUIET TERROR OF EVERY FATED ROMANCE breathes the inevitable question: how long will it last? So also with every trend, fad, and popular movement. But the pandemic-primed demand has proved to be an especially unpredictable beast. Therefore, to dedicate an entire issue to outlining trends has involved a complex balancing act between pent-up aspirations and an entirely new generation of luxury that is trend-forward, but conscious of Covid-adjacent etiquette.

In travel, for instance, charter-ready destinations and private aviation will be especially popular thanks to the whimsical aesthete who enjoys bespoke experiences and private sojourns. This niche has seen exponential growth. Apart from generous cabin space, low decibel levels and the spine-coddling comfort of supple leather seats, it is the reassurance of safety and privacy, apart from the above and beyond service that proves the lure. Depending on the type of aircraft, capacity, base city, and timing, the cost for hiring a charter flight could vary between ₹85,000 to ₹7.5 lakh per hour. Exclusive-use hotels/islands, and discreet hotel buyouts will be popular for the same reasons that caravan tourism is likely to find favour with multi-generational travellers.

Of course, fashion's nostalgia cycle has a habit of dredging up old looks, and the roulette wheel seems to have landed squarely on the return of pearls. From being considered old hat or rather old bling, the pearl revolution has seen some of the most envelope-pushing designers such as Gucci's Alessandro Michele make the gem that isn't a stone their thing. When it comes to Michele's clothing, pearls as buttons are just the beginning; Jimmy Choo, on the other hand, offers white satin loafers encrusted with pearls and clutches as well. Sandra Choi, creative director at the brand says, pearls have become part of the Jimmy Choo DNA: "It began as a challenge to myself. Pearls were always associated with elegance rather than fashion. How could I use pearls in a new way and portray them in a different light?"

Questioning the tried and tested seems to be a question for our cover star, actress Taapsee Pannu as well. Pannu's professional choices have made her the torchbearer of women-centric cinema in recent times. Shooting as many as four films a year and with three direct-to-digital releases in 2021, Pannu begins 2022 with her second Netflix release, *Looop Lapeta*, an adaptation of the cult German thriller, *Run Lola Run*. Netflix declared her film, *Haseen Dilruba* its most watched title of 2021 and *Rashmi Rocket* has garnered more than 20 million views on Zee5. On her part though, Pannu isn't keen to be boxed in as an OTT star, since she would rather show that it's possible to straddle both theatrical and streaming worlds easily.

But cinema isn't the only art form that is experimenting with options. The first-ever auction of NFTs in India was held on January 14. This is a new beginning for the Indian art market. While it is difficult to accurately gauge the size of the global NFT market, given its decentralised nature, research from last year pegs it at USD 22 billion.

Whatever the reasons driving the frenzy, it looks like 2022 will come through on the futurist promise of a very old fantasy: To boldly go where no man has gone before.

(Aroon Purie)

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2. SUVIR SARAN

Cookbook author, public speaker, farm advocate, chef, and restaurateur, Suvir Saran helmed Devi in New York City—the first Indian restaurant in America to receive a Michelin Star. He is also the chair of the Asian arm of the Culinary Institute of America. He is the only chef on the Nutrition Advisory Board at Brigham and Women's Hospital, a teaching affiliate of Harvard Medical School. He is currently working on a project in Central Delhi and his fourth book Instamatic was launched by Milap Publications in 2020.

3. PRATEEK SADHU

Sadhu is head chef and co-owner of Masque, an ingredient-driven restaurant in Mumbai, currently listed at #32 on the list of Asia's 50 Best Restaurants. His food places local produce at the fore, with an emphasis on sustainability, foraging and minimal-waste cooking.

4. INDRAJIT CHATTERJEE

Chatterjee is the founder of Prinseps. Originally with analytical degrees from Berkeley and Chicago, he is an art and history enthusiast. Prinseps was founded as a research-based institute and has seen many successes in documenting and auctioning important estates such as that of Wadia Movietone and Gobardhan Ash.

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CAR **VOLVO S90**; LOCATION COURTESY **RENAISSANCE MUMBAI CONVENTION CENTRE HOTEL**

One of a Kind

A prototype usually arrives balancing hope and expectation, but also riding first mover advantage. But when it comes to the iconic auto marque Maserati, you can imagine the decibels of excitement and hype that race along. An early prototype of the new MC20 convertible exited the gates of the historic Modena plant in the third week of December. This time around, Maserati has selected a new look for its camouflage, featuring a play of clouds; after all, it is a convertible. Much like the MC20 coupé, the new model remains original in its own daring way, designed for performance and perfection. The body is made of carbon fibre and composite materials in its entirety, an identical solution studied for all future configurations: coupé, convertible and, yes, even electric.

–By Chumki Bharadwaj

HOTSHEET

PICK OF THE MONTH

Hemp is at Hand

he new superfood that is taking beauty nd wellness by storm is hemp, so when oulTree introduced India's first Ayurvedic nge of Hemp products with 100 per cent ure, certified organic hemp seed oil, it's time to take notice. Youthful radiance, here I come. Although the new range onsists of 10 rejuvenating products, our ecommendation: Ayurvedic Treatment Oil Facial Oil.

Price ₹1,895; **Availability** flagship store, DLF Galleria, Gurugram; www.soultree.in

Winter Glow

What better way to battle the cold than to mellow its harshness with a smooth single malt. Glenmorangie's Highland whisky makers marry endless imagination with five key ingredients—wood, water, barley, yeast and time—to deliver deliciousness. Sample the Glenmorangie Quinta Ruban 14 Years Old to herald your delectable journey. Voluptuous flavour combinations include walnut and black pepper, mandarin orange and melted marshmallow, dark chocolate bar and peppermint. Convinced much?

Price ₹7,280 (Delhi); ₹11,875 (Mumbai); **Availability** Retail Stores

Gossamer Dreams

Beauty sleep means sleeping well, and here's how to catch up on quality sleep more than on 100 per cent pure silk. Silk bedding sets from Dame Essentials are not just for new nuptials, but for all those who like to invest in rest. The silk sheets are made with 22 momme grade 6A long thread pure mulberry silk.

Price ₹39,699 (set); **Availability** https://www.dameessentials.com

Night in Shining Armour

In my defence (IMD) by d'you is your skin's new best friend. Formulated to mimic your skin's natural barrier, this lightweight, fast-absorbing and creamy lipid-building complex not just feels like second skin, but protects as one. Whether oily, dry or sensitive, its promise to calm, moisturise and nourish remains unchanged despite varying weather conditions. Now that's a claim worth testing.

Price ₹3,500 for 50 ml; **Availability** https://www.dyou.co/

Riding the Coattails of History

Clearly, nostalgia is a sentiment that ranks high among haute horologists. Almost every luxury marque has a favourite iconic model that it reinterprets with the passage of time. So no surprises then when OMEGA chose to introduce a new Speedmaster Calibre 321 for its first major release of 2022. The launch takes inspiration from that very first Speedmaster, known as the CK2915-1, marking the collection's 65th anniversary. The watch comes with vintage details and a unique 38.6 mm case that has been crafted in 18K Canopus GoldTM, an exclusive material, which is OMEGA's own white gold alloy and is distinguished by its high brilliance, whiteness and longevity. For the ultimate contrast, the watch has been given a deep black onyx dial with an applied vintage OMEGA logo and typography featuring an oval "O"—a detail that was typical for the first CK2915 models. When this legendary collection was first launched in 1957, it changed the face of chronograph watchmaking forever. Specially created for professional racing car drivers, the watch was perfectly readable and easy to use, and was also the first in the world to feature a tachymeter scale on the bezel, as opposed to on the dial. Even today, the most sought-after of all, is the famous movement inside the watch. The Calibre 321 was the original movement used inside the Speedmaster in 1957. Truly, emulation is the best form of flattery.

Price on request;
Availability Brand Stores

What's Love got to do with it?

Artisanal ice cream brand Cold Love launches their 'Warm Love' winter menu on home delivery

By **CHUMKI BHARADWAJ**

Clammy days and gloomy skies are best warded off by seeking refuge under a goose down duvet, armed with hot coffee and a dead English poet. But clichés are clam chowder for the contrarian. Instead, reach for a chilled swirl of ice cream. We recommend Delhi's very own artisanal ice cream brand, Cold Love's newest dazzle: Winter Snuggle. Made with rum and chunks of plum cake, it's an edible version of the snooze button on your alarm. It offers you the indulgence of keeping the world on hold as you luxuriate. However, if you're the kind that needs warm assurances and traditional affirmations then Cold Love's winter menu, christened 'Warm Love' is right up your alley. Their fantastic offering of warm desserts home deliver deliciousness to your doorstep.

Curated by Michelin-starred chef Suvir Saran and his protégé chef Vardaan Marwah, it includes cakes, hot chocolate, cookies, marshmallows and other whimsical wonders. Pair the thick, sludgy Hot Chocolate with homemade marshmallows. The marshmallow can also be paired with their signature cookies (Middle right) to make a Campfire Cookie Sandwich. The cakes include Three Indulgences—a banana chocolate cake served with caramel sauce and caramelised popcorn (Top right), Pudding Divine Brulee—a bread pudding with layers of chocolate and orange marmalade and Spiced Apple & Creme Custard Cake (Bottom right)—a decadent ménage à trois with apples, cream cheese and caramel.
Available Cold Love Cafes in Connaught Place, Vasant Vihar, Gurgaon and Noida; Home Delivery
www.coldlove.in or call 97111 36997

On Taapsee
Tweed Skirt, Tweed Blazer, **Aroka**; Bralette, **Alula**; Jewellery **Misho**; Ankle boots **Saint G**
Car **Volvo S90**

FIRMLY IN THE DRIVER'S SEAT

TAAPSEE PANNU'S PROFESSIONAL TRAJECTORY ENSURES THAT SHE IS THE ANCHOR OF THE FILMS SHE CHOOSES TO BE A PART OF, EVEN AS HER CHOICES ARE FAR FROM FORMULAIC.

By **SUHANI SINGH**

Taapsee Pannu never dreamt of being the torchbearer of women-centric cinema. When she started out a decade ago in the South, there was no plan or long-term vision. "I had a small goal of surviving for just five to seven years in the industry," she says, referring to what she was told was the shelf life of actresses. "I'd say in interviews that a decade from now I'd be settled in some other profession. "Acting though, didn't end up being a dalliance; it became a duty, one she loved performing. For Pannu the quest to not settle for less and seek meatier, complex parts is worth all the effort. "I have always felt that if an actress does one film which works and makes people look at protagonists in a different light, then it opens doors for 10 other actresses," Pannu says. "Women who did it before me enabled me to seize such an opportunity. I am glad to contribute the change in some way."

Currently, Pannu is breezing through the doors, shooting four films a year. After three direct-to-digital releases in 2021, she begins 2022 with her second Netflix release in *Looop Lapeta*, an adaptation of cult German thriller, *Run Lola Run*. Much like her last release, *Rashmi Rocket*, Pannu spends the better half of the film running but this time it is not to win and make a larger point, but to save a dude in distress who happens to be her boyfriend (played by Tahir Raj Bhasin). "It is not heartland but new age cinema," she says of the comedy thriller. "OTT gives you a wide reach internationally. I believe with its technique it will connect with people."

Winning Formula

While there's no standardised way to measure success on streaming, Netflix declared *Haseen Dillruba* as its most watched title of 2021 and *Rashmi Rocket* garnered more than 20 million views on Zee5. Pannu though, doesn't want to be boxed in as an OTT star. She would rather show that it's pos-

On Taapsee Sculpted Blazer, Side tape trousers, **Amit Aggarwal**; Jewellery **Bhavya Ramesh**
Car **Volvo S90**

GUNNING FOR GLORY
In Netflix release, *Looop Lapeta*, Taapsee Pannu is the devoted girlfriend who sprints into action to save her boyfriend (Tahir Raj Bhasin) from a dreaded gangster. The comedy thriller is her fourth direct-to-digital release (Unit Stills: above and left).

Photographs THE HOUSE OF PIXELS - VAISHNAV PRAVEEN and APEKSHA MAKER;
Styling AMANDEEP KAUR with RIA RAWLANI and NISHA ARORA;
Hair SEEMA MANE;
Make up MANASHA AT FAZE MANAGEMENT
Location courtesy RENAISSANCE MUMBAI CONVENTION CENTRE HOTEL

RENAISSANCE MUMBAI CONVENTION CENTRE HOTEL
The Renaissance Mumbai Convention Centre Hotel is set against the splendour of the Powai Lake. With spacious suites and lavish rooms, this landmark hotel offers a luxurious retreat, nestled on 15 acres of lush greenery with scenic views of the lake. Savour great culinary experiences at the award-winning Lake View Cafe offering Italian, Indian, Chinese and International cuisines. The hotel is a frontrunner when it comes to safety and well-being of the guests, and follows the highest practices of health and hygiene to ensure a safe and unforgettable stay. Renowned for their impeccable service, undeniable warmth and world class facilities, Renaissance is a hospitality experience that demands an encore.

sible to straddle both theatrical and streaming worlds easily. By now she is well-aware of the diktats by which the film industry functions. "The way I look at my career is that I want to be a viable actor," she says. "That is judged through how many bums you put on seats. It is not an ideal way to measure [your worth] but in our industry a film's budget is judged by the market value of the actor." Pannu's mission is to enhance that figure with every film she does. It will be evident in her second 2022 release, *Shabaash Mithu*, a biopic on cricket captain Mithali Raj which is expected to hit theatres to coincide with the Women's ODI World Cup, which is scheduled in March.

Such is Pannu's professional trajectory that it is but expected that she be the anchor of the films she chooses to be a part of. The 34-year-old embraces the responsibility but she also seeks to essay a variety of roles. In *Haseen Dillruba*, Pannu tried to deviate from her streak of playing spirited, determined women (*Saand Ki Aankh*, *Thappad*, *Manmarziyaan*, *Pink*) to enact the role of a deceitful wife. But the film came under fire for what was seen as her protagonist Rani's desperate attempts to win over her husband. Pannu was surprised by the scrutiny the creators faced. "Rani always had the agency of choice and power," she says defending the character. "Problem is when you tell me what you thought was right should be what the character should have done. That's against the idea of feminism."

Much like her peers Anushka Sharma, Deepika Padukone, Kangana Ranaut and Alia Bhatt, Pannu too has taken on the hat of a producer. Harking back to her own beginnings, she has named the production house, Outsiders Films. "I wanted to be involved at a ground level and wanted control—on marketing and putting it together—without being called the intrusive actor," she says. Intrusive or not, involved she definitely is.

ARM CANDY
The Eos Box Clutch is gorgeously embellished with oversized pearl detail lining the edge of the bag, adding eccentric elegance.

Pearls before Thine

The gem that isn't a stone is leaving no stone unturned to turn its fusty and frumpy image on its head. The pearl revolution has ushered in a fashionably modern form, courted by jewellers and couturiers alike.

TREND REPORT

FASHION | JEWELLERY

By **ANNA MURPHY**

There's been a lot of fuss recently about the chef Salt Bae and his £345 gold-encrusted steak, available at his new London restaurant, Nusr-Et. To which I say, pah! Or rather, pearls! That was what Cleopatra was said to have crushed into a glass of wine to make Marc Antony's dinner the most costly in history. Take that, Salt! (May I call you Salt?) What a magical elixir that pearl-laced libation must have been, albeit not one to consume with a tickly throat.

A luminescent past

Pearls have always had lustre—metaphorical and literal. In ancient China they communicated the supposed purity of the wearer. In the Dark Ages knights would wear pearls into battle as a protective talisman. The pearl is reputed to be the first precious gem to have been discovered by humans; the earliest example was found in the sarcophagus of a Persian princess dated to 420BC and can be seen in the Louvre in Paris.

It's not just about the symbolism, of course. There is no better complexion flatterer than the pearl. This was the reason Coco Chanel declared that "a woman needs ropes and ropes ofpearls". Not that—groundbreaker that she was—Chanel was hung up on whether hers were real or faux, merrily mixing both in the array of sautoirs that hung around her neck.

All of which makes it a tad baffling that there was a period when I was growing up when pearls were what your mother wore, or your grandmother, and what you most certainly didn't. There was no jewellery I coveted less when I was 19 than pearls. Girls in pearls weren't cool, and so they weren't me. Pearls were old hat, or rather old bling. They looked fusty and frumpy.

Behold the pearl revolution

What a change there has been. Some of the best and most envelope-pushing designers, be it big international names such as Alessandro Michele at Gucci or more quietly celebrated British ones such as Amy Powney at Mother of Pearl, have

Photos GETTYIMAGES

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ROPES OF PEARLS
Coco Chanel was hung up on pearls, whether real or faux, merrily mixing both in the array of sautoirs that hung around her neck.

TREND REPORT

FASHION | JEWELLERY

Image Courtesy ASTAGURU

Image Courtesy ASTAGURU

Image Courtesy ASTAGURU

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A DROP IN THE OCEAN
Big international brands such as Gucci to Jimmy Choo have made the gem that isn't a stone their thing.

made the gem that isn't a stone their thing. One strand in Gucci's diverse aesthetic under Michele has been the kind of jewellery that would have fitted right in at the court of Henry VIII. Its bee necklace with a faux drop pearl would have looked just so at the neck of Anne Boleyn, for as long as the king decreed that she should remain in possession of said neck, of course (£435, gucci.com). When it comes to Michele's clothing, pearls as buttons are just the beginning these days, including on a pastel jacquard jacket (£1,850, net-a-porter.com), which comes with a gold leather collar studded with, yes, you guessed it.

Powney loves the gem so much she put it in her brand name, and uses outsize faux iterations on many of Mother of Pearl's bestselling styles. Its Wren coat, for example, has ruffled shoulders adorned with them (available in assorted colours, from £495, motherofpearl.co.uk). "I always say the theme tune to our brand is the sound of pearls dropping on to the studio floor," Powney says. "For me it's about modernising what is a chic, timeless aesthetic."

Another British brand that has a long-term commitment to nacre is Jimmy Choo. Its white satin Varsha loafers come veritably encrusted, and are some of the most special shoes I have seen this season (£1,425, jimmychoo.com), as area trainer version (£495). Sandra Choi, creative director at the brand, says the pearl "has become part of the Jimmy Choo DNA. It began as a challenge to myself. Pearls were always associated with elegance rather than fashion. How could I use pearls in a new way and portray them in a different light?"

Rise and Shine

Myriad are the jewellery operations that are determinedly bringing pearls into the 21st century. Two favouritesof mine are Anissa Kermiche and Completed works, which deliver a modernity that is strongly sculptural yet feminine. Kermiche tells me of a childhood spent "sneaking into my mum's jewellery box, which was full of broken pearl necklaces. They are now my favourite gems. For a designer their spherical shape enables all kinds of eccentricity as you sketch."Suitably eccentric is Kermiche's single Swirl earring, its curving line of natural pearls sitting both in front of and behind the lobe (£380, anissakermiche.com). And similarly non-conformist is Completed works's multi-pearl and white-topaz gold-vermeil ringandpendant necklace (£285 and £350 respectively, completedworks.com). Delicious. I just hope Father Christmas is reading.

Courtesy The Sunday Times (London)

Passport to Freedom

For the itinerant traveller, moping over time lost is almost over. Here are top trends, haute spots and travel options that may be just what the doctor ordered.

By **DANIEL D'SOUZA**
President & Country Head,
SOTC Travel

As the resilient travel industry rebuilds and continues to reinvent itself to fall in step with the pandemic's unique propensity to change and disrupt; it takes a hard-nosed statusquoist to deny that the way we travel in the Covid-era has changed the world over. Based on the nation-wide vaccination programme and positive affirmations, travel is bound to bounce back. Hope floats as they say, and here is your dinghy, or luxury yacht as the case may be, to sail away to your dream destinations. For all those discerning travellers waiting to find their sea legs, here is what's trending for travel in 2022. From the inspired to the intrepid, there's something to float everyone's boat.

For the whimsical aesthete who enjoys curated experiences, there's bespoke experiences and private sojourns; those waiting to drink from the

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THE SWISS WAY
Mesmerising
Bavarian Alps

SWISH SET - Arrive in style!

SALLY FORTH Rediscover the joys of travelling, albeit differently

wellness spring can enjoy rejuvenation breaks. The indulgent gastronome can revel in exotic food trails and experiential holidays in eclectic accommodations. For the adrenaline junkie, the undiscovered southernmost tip of the seventh continent still needs a check on the bucket list.

THE POWER OF PERSONALISATION

The pandemic has impacted the way in which we perceive luxury; travellers are now more concerned with privacy, safety, and reliability. Private charters, once the chariot of choice for the uber rich or the super busy is now a more universal ask. This industry has seen an exponential growth. Apart from feeling protected, safeguarded, and secure, the bespoke services they offer—right from the time you book to inflight service to exclusive concierge services—travellers are spoilt for choice. All the while be reassured of safety and privacy, apart from the above and beyond a service like this summons. Personalised in-flight services include attendants who ensure minutest demands are met with ease, to a sous chef to spoil you with gastronomical delicacies at 35,000 feet. (www.tajair-tata.aeroor www.jetsetgo.in) Depending on the type of aircraft, capacity, base city, and timing, the cost for hiring a charter flight could vary between ₹85,000 to ₹7.5 lakh per hour.

Of course, travel businesses other than hospitality will also re-invent themselves to cater to the expectations of the luxe travellers and deliver services that furnish the 'above and beyond' category.

A PRIVATE ESCAPE

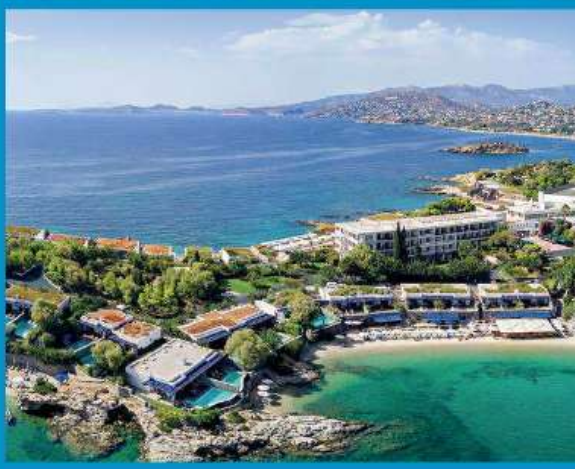
Secret hotel entrances and private suites for the elite have been the requirements of famous celebs the world over, this trend is gaining traction in a pandemic world, where the cognizanti are looking

to get away to serene and secluded destinations away from the surge. Exclusive-use hotels/islands and discreet luxury hotels like Nihi Sumba (Sumba, Indonesia www.nihi.com) that offer luxury travellers the great outdoors along with a holiday that helps them reconnect with nature and support local communities all at the same time.

With a focus on details to 'suit guests' needs—right from in-room check-ins to ensuring that every little detail of their stay is personalised—private villas or an entire island is part of the discerning traveller's wishlist. Personal butlers to pack/unpack and cater to micro and macro desires are just the tip of the iceberg that aims to shock and awe with an entirely bespoke experience. For a regal touch from the Ottoman-era, book yourself in on one of the exclusive suites at the Palace Wing of Çırağan Palace Kempinski Istanbul and cruise on a private yacht on the Bosphorus. Arrive in style at the hotel by limousine, boat or helicopter. Additionally, the hotel offers an exclusive service where the welcome team will receive you right outside the aerobridge gate and escort you through passport control with a fast track service, overseeing all your last minute needs till your comfortable drop to the hotel.

BACK TO NATURE

Even prior to the pandemic, detox therapy had been a trend for the past two years,amplifying the need for mental and physical wellbeing. Travelling for self-care is the need of the hour since it helps stimulate a 'recovery to self'. Mindfulness retreats and deep-rooted detoxes including digital detox holidays for both the young and the not-so-young will top the charts for 2022. The choices include luxurious retreats in Austria, Switzerland, Germany, Japan, Maldives and Thailand among others. Every country offers their specialty age-old treatments, natural hot springs, along with



ROYAL SOJOURN
Çırağan Palace Kempinski is the only Ottoman Imperial Palace and Hotel perched on the Bosphorus

nature's bounty as a much-needed add on for the much clamoured-for calm.

SchlossElmau Luxury Spa Retreat & Cultural Hideaway, a secluded sanctuary in the Bavarian Alps (www.schloss-elmau.de/en/) provides not only tranquility but a great family escape or romantic haven for couples. Indulge in luxurious spa treatments and rejuvenate in the lap of nature at the same time.

MULTI-GENERATIONAL TRAVEL

Travel restrictions and extended lockdowns limited the reunion of families. Naturally, family holiday reunions and multi-generational travel is all set to trend in 2022. Resorts and eclectic accommodations that cater to the needs of different age groups will continue to stay in demand, as will theme parks and safari trips that continue to ride the preferred route for reunion travel. Boutique luxury resorts that are spacious and include community areas, private pools and nature trails along with activities, gourmet options like cooking classes, wellness and more that allow families and groups of friends to be cocooned together will continue to see buy-outs. Unique activities and exploring the destination in private van tours will find many takers. Caravan Tourism will garner interest from multi-generational travellers as well.

THAT HEALING FEELING
Rejuvenate in thermal spas (above); Gleneagles Hotel, 5 Star Luxury Hotel, Spa & Gold Resort, Scotland (Top Left); Grand Resort Lagonissi - luxury beach resort of Athens Riviera (Left)

LUXURY CRIBS

The 72 acre private peninsula—Grand Resort Lagonissi in the Athenian Riviera (Lagonissi, AthensSounion Avenue, Greece/www.lagonissiresort.gr/).
A perfect family reunion resort that caters to children, tweens, teens, parents, grandparents with varied activities to appeal to different tastes, interest and accommodation types along with a private beach. The Gleneagles Hotel in Scotland (www.gleneagles.com/) is another great family escape with its charming country estate. This luxurious rural family adventure offers the glorious playground of a luxury hotel, spa and golf and many more adventure activities in the heart of the Scottish countryside.

If you want to limit flying time, India offers glorious serene and beautiful plantation villas in Coorg, Wayanad, Siliguri, Darjeeling and Sikkim. Bask in a heritage villa, all the while building travel memories with the entire family.

LIVE THE DREAM
Svalbard, Longyearbyen, 78 degree North

NATURE'S THRILLS
Explore Antarctica's stunning wildlife and breathtaking landscapes

ON THE MOVE: From Trains to Cruises

Appreciating the journey and not just the destination will be the mantra in 2022. Explorers who are bitten by the travel bug to discover the unexplored and tick-off their brag-worthy bucket-list are spoilt for choice. Explore undiscovered Antarctica on a cruise and other unique expedition cruise routes like the Arctic: Svalbard-Greenland. Even river cruises in the Amazon and in our very own inland waters with Antara Cruises or Ganges River cruises offer a plethora of options. Epic train journeys like the Golden Eagle Trans-Siberian Express (Moscow-Vladivostok). The legendary Orient Express (sine 1883), A Belmond Train from Paris to Istanbul or historic carriages of the Venice Simplon-Orient-Express or even the hidden timeless jewel of the Canadian Rockies —The Rocky Mountaineer—offers luxurious scenic glass dome coaches that showcase rugged alpine terrain and wildlife. Opt for the GoldLeaf service for the ultimate luxury experience. El Transcantabrico Gran Lujo (https://eltrentranscantabrico.com/en/) traverses the Atlantic-facing part of Northern Spain known as España Verde-Green Spain, and its hinterland. This gem of a train with a limited option of only 28 passengers per ride offers the perfect chariot for an intimate travel experience tailormade for Covid travel.

Visit Svalbard's, Longyearbyen where extraordinary is ordinary. The small arctic town is located at 78 degree north, one of the closest to the North Pole. The arctic wilderness is visible throughout the town—just what a nature enthusiast requires; sail the fjords of Tromso for Northern lights and the mid-night sun (between mid-May and late July).

In 2022, we expect luxury travellers to explore untouched gems and eco-friendly hideaways across the globe. From hidden falls in Switzerland to secret gardens in Barcelona, dive in sunken caves in Mexico; immerse in the ritual of the bamboo forests in Japan, among the many wonders across the planet. The past two years have been very dynamic and while we cannot predict the change or challenges that might surface in 2022, travel will definitely continue. It's not just about ratcheting up visa stamps on your passport or conversation avenues for cognac evenings; it goes to the primal urge to explore beyond the confines of your hearth. Ultimately, that's what the heart desires.

1 SOON News And E-Books (77 messages): K...
MEDIA NEWS (6 messages): +91 96001 84940 7

Sporting a Winner

Ruggedness meets functionality with these timepieces as luxury brands court the adrenaline frenzy

By **DHIRAM SHAH**

Ruggedness can be beautiful. Luxury sports watches are the Henry Cavills of the horological world. They're versatile, durable, sleek, and exude prestige. What was once seen as a radical crossover between bejewelled timepieces and a watch that can bear the grime is commonplace practice today. A person's watch is said to be the reflection of their personality, which is why it isn't so surprising to see these watches dominate fashion trends these days. They are patronised by a younger demographic that is indomitable, keen to live experiences and adventures, and unapologetically announce their achievements.

"Whether it's motorcycles or watches, I have been lucky to have worked in fields that I have been passionate about, especially Rado, which is a strong, beautiful, and a unique brand," confesses Adrian Bosshard, the motorsports loving CEO of the Swiss giant. Even watchmakers are focussing on creating products that echo the passions of conscious consumers. "We have consistently proposed novel proportions, materials, and technologies with transformative and far-reaching impacts," says Jean Marc Pontroué, the CEO of Panerai, which recently partnered with BRABUS a German high-performance automotive aftermarket tuning company to create an exciting, sporty watch. Here, we look at some exemplary timepieces from the genre that have held the mast high.

HUBLOT Big Bang All Black Zermatt

A skyward marvel, the Matterhorn Mountain, has been a source of endless inspiration for the Big Bang All Black collection. The symbolic Swiss landmark is one of the toughest climbs in the world, which makes the two versions of the Zermatt a useful companion to have along. It is available in a 44mm men's version in 100 limited pieces and a 41mm women's version in 50 pieces. Both renditions have the Matterhorn emblazoned at either end of the dial, respectively. The black and grey dial and strap is stunning to look at. Rugged and roguishly handsome, now that's what makes a watch lust-worthy.

Roger Dubuis Excalibur Pirelli 39mm

When an Italian tyre manufacturer and a Swiss luxury watchmaker collude, the results are bound to be exciting. The result: Three exciting 39mm luxury timepieces that can bravely survive a day at the racetrack. The RDDBEX0817 (28 pieces) comes with a Pirelli strap that holds together a case with a skeletal honeycomb-design dial, stark bezel notches, and open lugs. The timepiece is a monochrome rendition of the former with the remarkable RD5108SQ calibre and NAC-coated main plate on the dial. The RDDBEX0816 introduces pink gold to the former's monochrome. Both these versions are available in 88 limited edition pieces.

Rolex Submariner 41mm

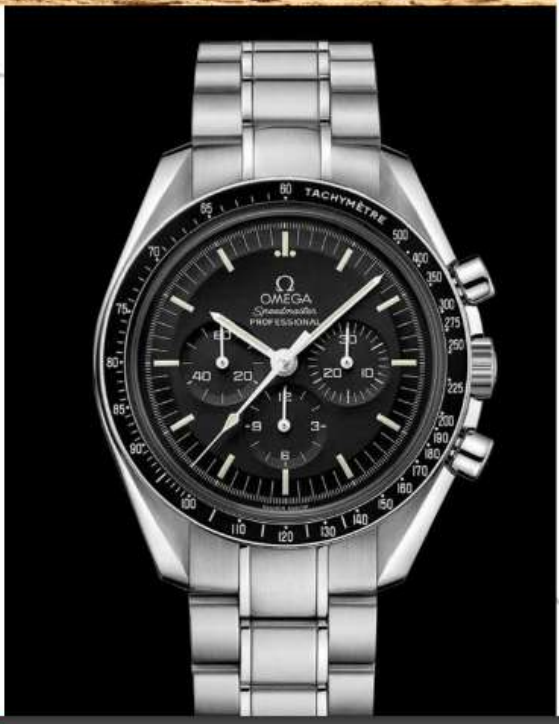
One couldn't imagine this list without the most recognisable luxury sports watch. The Submariner 41mm now comes in seven distinct avatars, echoing the long-overdue overhaul. While it mirrors its heritage to an acceptable degree, the new Submariner has subtly improved the case, bracelet, and movement. It comes in various styles, from a no-date version to a trio of black and blue dials and a white gold and yellow gold option. As expected, all versions are submersible up to 300m and offer a robust 70-hour power reserve.

TREND REPORT

WATCH | ADVENTURE

Montblanc 1858 Geosphere Gobi Desert Limited Edition

While the list paid homage to mountains, oceans, and space, Montblanc's drop-dead gorgeous 1858 Geosphere reflects the sands of the Gobi Desert. The well-balanced dial is a treat for the eyes with its sandy-beige fume and aesthetically accentuated highlights. Inspired by legendary mountaineer Reinhold Messner's solo-trek across the Gobi Desert in 2004, the watch pays fitting tribute. The case is made of bronze, keeping it consistent with previous editions. It sports both the hemispheres at 12 o'clock and 6 o'clock and a date window at 3 o'clock.



Omega Speedmaster Moonwatch Chronograph

This lunar-inspired favourite has thrived for years, even decades after the moon mission. The new Moonwatch Master Chronometer now packs the calibre 3861 movement. It is held together by a steel bracelet with specially designed links. The step dial offers more depth and a chronograph hand, both borrowed from yesteryear versions of the watch. The asymmetrical case with three sub-dials, the detailed bezel, discrete lugs, and luminescent hour markers make it one of the most recognised timepieces out there. Nostlagia lives on familiar grounds.

ART EXPLORES THE NFT CANVAS

Non Fungible Tokens are a new trend and here to stay. Here's what you need to know.

By **INDRAJIT CHATTERJEE**
Founder & Director, Princeps

Art is always executed on some medium—cave walls using natural pigments, wood panels, watercolour on paper, canvases with oil or acrylic-based paints. It was only natural that with thea dvent of the computer, with its editing and videography tools that art began to be created on a digital medium. This is here to stay and grow. Preparatory sketches have now been replaced by studies done with digital tools. The progression to digital art being more pervasive (than physical art) has been in the making over the last couple of decades. It has reached tipping point that makes it clear that a majority of the major exhibitions in the future will be based around digital art.

Early Days

One of the early experiences of the writer in college in the 1990s was an introduction to VideoArt, art that was sold literally on VHS tapes. The problem with digital art is that copies can be made with high fidelity, so the ownership of the artwork is decided by the information on some gallery ledger. Implying that if I claimed that I owned a digital artwork, and another person had a copy of the same (possibly downloaded or copied), the information in the gallery's ledger would determine who the owner was and who simply had an image with no ownership value.

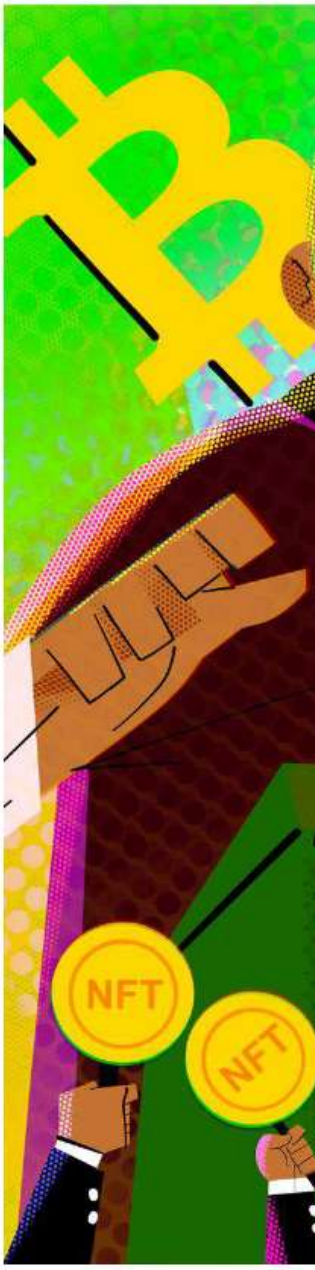


Illustration SIDDHANT JUMDE

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MUSINGS
Lot No. 18, Gypsy Queen (1948), Gouache on paper, Gobardhan Ash (Below); Lot No. 22, Devi Bahan (1948), Gouache on board, Gobardhan Ash (Bottom)

Blockchains and Smart Contract is exactly this gallery ledger stored in a decentralised form (aka Blockchain) and containing information on the owner, edition number, and some other pieces of information (Smart Contract). This is also referred to as a non-fungible token, the word non-fungible simply implying that the reference is to a unique artwork and not currency.

First Ever Auction of NFT's in India

Prinseps is holding the first-ever auction of NFTs in India. In doing so, we are going back in history to re-create an exhibition from 1950 by the artist Gobardhan Ash, a founder of the YoungArtists' Union (1931), Art Rebel Center (1933), and a member of the Calcutta Group (1943). An avant-garde artist who stirred free from the style of the Bengal School, and painted what can now bedescribed as 'Avatars', primitive figures with various character or personality traits. Who would have thought that almost seventy years later, cryptopunk NFT's (which are essentially avatars) would herald the beginning of the NFT craze and sell for millions of dollars.

This is a new beginning for the Indian Art market. There will be many more such NFT drops (the word used to describe a digital exhibition or an auction); shortening the time taken for an artwork to be sold from the artist to the collector and possibly resold with the ownership information safely stored on the blockchain. Auction houses and galleries have often been advised to narrow their focus on a few artists. The NFT space will open this up for others whether it isfor a forgotten master like Gobardhan Ash or a contemporary artist, all of which is good for the Indian artmarket.

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ON OFFER

Lot No. 44, Startled (1950), Gouache on board, Gobardhan Ash (Above); Lot No. 02, Irani (1950), Gouache on silk cloth, Gobardhan Ash (Right); Lot No. 56, Rupkatha (1948), Gouache on paper, Gobardhan Ash (Middle right); Lot No. 40, Hunger (Dog) (1948), Gouache on board, Gobardhan Ash (Extreme right, opposite page)

Cryptocurrency

While it need not always be the case, NFTs are generally bought and sold using crypto currency and because of this, the NFT valuations may see speculation—a spillover from the crypto currency markets. On the flip side, being associated with the crypto markets has also had a positive effect in that it has enjoined many new collectors, which was a very slow process in traditional art.

The first Indian auction of NFTs will see the NFTs minted on the Ethereum blockchain, and sold to collectors via the auction process, and paid for via fiat currency as is standard. In essence, we are taking any speculation out of the NFT sale by only accepting fiat currency. Remember, notwithstanding the technology or the crypto craze, the underlying technology is still art. It's still about composition, aesthetics, art history, movements, artist progressions, and the discussion around art will be similar as before and continue to evolve. In essence, what will have changed is the timeline that will probably shrink from decades to maybe years. An old adage expresses modern art as something that 'shocks or surprises'. That remains relevant for NFT's as well.

Prinseps held its first NFT auction—The Gobardhan Ash Live Auction on January 14, 2022. The auction offered 70 lots including 35 Gouache's by Gobardhan Ash from the 1950s, and 35 contemporary NFTs based on his work with bids from both traditional and new collectors. The majority of NFT artworks were sold between ₹25,000 - ₹27,500, with the exception of a few highlights such as Lot 70- 'Prayer', sold for ₹35,000; and Lot 8 - Mother and Son, sold for ₹31,250 further creating a new record for NFT's in India.

NOTEWORTHY

It is difficult to accurately gauge the size of the NFT market given its decentralised nature. However research from last year pegs the market at USD 22 billion. This number has definitely grown exponentially over the past year, indicating a buoyant demand from buyers purchasing multiple works with 750,000 unique buyers and 350,000 unique sellers (globally as of November 2021). It is also worth noting that blockbuster sales often run into millions. A case in point: A non-fungible token by digital artist Beeple Everydays: The First 5000 Days, which sold for $69.3 million at Sotheby's in March 2021, was the most expensive NFT ever sold at auction. As the NFT market rages on, market capitalisation grew 1,785 per cent in 2021.

A SERIOUS MAN

Equally feted and talented actor, Nawazuddin Siddiqui on why streaming platforms provide an evolved canvas for both the audiences as well as actors.

By **SUHANI SINGH**

Nawazuddin Siddiqui was one of the first actors to testdrive the OTT vehicle before it became a sought-after model. *Sacred Games* (2018), Netflix's first Indian original, seems like a distant memory but it was to acquaint audiences with long format storytelling. Five years back, Siddiqui saw what his peers couldn't or didn't bother to. Streaming platforms gave access to a wider audience compared to theatres, which governed by commercial diktats made it difficult for non-studio, non-star driven films to run long. The stories on the services, he felt, were "made with daring". Most importantly, it was the opportunity that it provided to the deep pool of talent "who wouldn't have come to the forefront in [theatrical] films".

The two-year, and running, reign of the Covid-19 pandemic has only reaffirmed Siddiqui's beliefs. With cinemas shut for nearly seven months in 2020 and running at 50 per cent occupancy in many states thereafter, the streaming platforms filled the entertainment gap. India has 40 plus streaming platforms in multiple languages, which in turn, have led to the rise of a new legion of actors, writers, directors, composers and technicians. They are no longer

Photo: JESSE DEFLORIO

GLORY DAYS
Actor Nawazuddin Siddiqui in NYC, during the International Emmy Awards, where his film Serious Men was nominated

seen as fad or a temporary alternative to cinemas. Studios have set up separate production wings to develop digital content and actors are no longer shying away from OTT. Subscriptions have surged so have the number of productions.

For Siddiqui, the most rewarding aspect about the streaming boom is that audiences are now more "educated about content" having been exposed to international shows and films. "This very audience will go into theatres," he says, hopeful that their evolved palette in cinema will make them seek different stories. It is already pushing filmmakers to go beyond the formula, one that made Siddiqui wonder if he could fit in Hindi cinema. Says Siddiqui, "Does only a six-foot-tall and fair man get to fall in love? They think this sells. But now they know that other stuff also does."

The artist in him is sated than ever before as scripts come with well-etched characters where "the inner world is delved into; there's some thought given to it, some complexities there." That same artist is also concerned that filmmakers don't take the assembly line approach in their quest to feed the hungry beast: the OTT platforms. It explains why he hasn't done another series but only films like *Serious Men*, which earned him an International Emmy Award nomination. "There are certain production houses which are making random content for OTT," he says. "I don't want it [streaming shows] to become like [TV] serials."

Vegging Out

Don't just brandish a boring old celery stalk or turn to tomato juice when it comes to stirring passion. Mix it up in style and raise the bar with delicious and imaginative vegetables as cocktail mixers.

By **SUVIR SARAN**
with Vardaan Marwah

Who could have imagined that our mothers' dreams would come true through our indulgenceof cocktails and alcohol? No, I'm not kidding at all. "Eat your vegetables" is a command that is easy to follow with a smart and measured relationship between you and alcohol, and is easier still when accompanied by even more vegetables—and herbs and aromaticsas well.

In the recipes I share here, I have taken a plant-forward approach to the mixing of cocktails, and it is my hope that as you sip on these drinks, you can savour the flavours and connect with the earth literally and figuratively.

Drink in moderation

Remember, even good things take on bad airs when taken to excess. The good news is that alcohol in moderation is nothing to be scoffed at. Its benefits are life enriching, and mixing a drink with veggies only makes the activity that much more fun, colourful, and yes, deliciously healthy.

Mixology and preaching aren't ever a good mix, so I leave you with hopes that you will put seasonal veggies, including ugly, gnarly ones, and even veggie wastes to use, and extract from them both sensual and visual magic. With just a little effort and depth of taste, your cocktail game will become the talk of your town and a pat on the back from your physician.

Savour these concoctions as you enjoy fun conversations, participate in the creation of memories, and create a vibe that is playful, beneficial, and delicious all at once.

Family and friends that eat and drink together are people who live happier and healthier lives. Let's make 2022 a year where we understand, respect, and appreciate the role that plants can play in making our lives and the world we share with one another healthier and more hospitable and sustainable.

Carrot Rumerale

This drink gets its rich colour from black carrot juice, which also makes it rich in all the vitamin goodness you need for living mindfully. Add a smoked dried red chili and muddle in the shaker and then add all the ingredients and shake if you want a hot-hot cocktail.

45ml vodka; 30ml black carrot juice
15ml lemon juice; 15ml sugar syrup
Pinch of black salt; Pinch of pepper
Ginger Ale

In a glass of your choice add all the ingredients and top it up with ginger ale.

Verdant Star

This Verdant Star cocktail packs over 15 per cent of your daily dose of Vitamin C and also other nutrients. Add more basil and peas if you like your cocktail with a grassy personality. Substitute basil with cilantro and add green chilies if you want a spicier punch.

1/2 a medium sizes cucumber; 6-8 fresh green pea pods, shelled
3-5 basil leaves; Dash of sea salt; 2 tablespoons fresh lemon juice
30 ml vodka; 15 ml elderflower liquor (St. Germain)
1 teaspoon Agave Nectar; 1/2 cup ice; 30 ml club soda
Garnish: Additional tarragon or basil

Muddle vigourously peeled and sliced cucumber, fresh or thawed frozen green peas, fresh basil leaves, and a dash of sea salt in a cocktail shaker. Add fresh lemon juice, vodka, St-Germain (elderflower liqueur), agave nectar, and ice; cover and shake 30 seconds. Strain into a coupe glass. Top with club soda. Garnish with additional tarragon, if desired.

Photos DARSHA DEVON HARRIS

Mashobra Heat

Sweet peppers add both flavour and rich nutrition to this cocktail. Add green chiles if you want to spike up the heat and make the drink more incendiary. When in the mood and planning ahead, I am also known to add a few curry leaves with the peppers as I muddle them.

1 red bell pepper, roughly chopped; 45 ml gin
30 ml lemon juice
15 ml sugar syrup
2 dashes tabasco
1 egg white
Pinch of freshly ground black peppercorn; Ice
Angostura bitters

In a cocktail shaker add the chopped bell pepper and muddle with love. Add the rest of the ingredients and ice and shake well for 2-3 minutes. Strain the drink in a glass of your choice. Top it with a dash of Angostura bitters.

The Some of its Parts

Outlining India with its local ingredients is to pay homage to the versatality and genius of its food. Here are a few unsung heroes that simply humm on your tongue

By **PRATEEK SADHU,** Head Chef & Co-Owner, Masque

The hero in my dish is always the ingredient. I try not to mask them; they are there for all to see, smell and taste. Travel plays an important role in what I do, because it gives me the chance to understand the stories behind the food people eat, to taste different ingredients, and to learn from and eat as locals do. It allows me to discover a side of India that I don't always get to see when living in a big city.These ingredients define their regions of origin; I try to interpret them my own way, bringing them to the forefront so our guests can experience them as I did. The idea is to summon India on your plate, with your palate as guide and traveller.

Sea buckthorn

I call it a Vitamin C tsunami. It's an extremely versatile ingredient that I love working with; it's been five years since I first came across it in India and we've used it every year at Masque. I'd read about a supplier just before we opened the restaurant; I booked the first flight out and drove six hours from Leh to the Nubra Valley, where this thorny bush grows in the wild. It grows in Lahaul and Spiti too, and is usually used as natural fencing

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SEA CREATURES
Achari Squid and Seabuckthorn juice

LOCAL GLORY
Seabuckthorn sorbet, pink peppercorn salt and coriander oil (left); kasundi sweet potato and black carrot kanji (below); Jalpai chutney (bottom left); Seabuckthorn donut with black pepper cream and wood sorrel (opposite page)

because the bushes are so prickly. I'd read about a few people juicing the berries and using them in cosmetics, but couldn't recall ever seeing it on a restaurant menu in India. We foraged for the berries with the help of a few locals, and brought around 25 kilos back to Mumbai with us.

The sea buckthorn berries are highly astringent, but extremely versatile. We've served it juiced, and with squid and fish, but I also wanted to pair it with a spice indigenous to India and pepper was my first choice. We made a sea buckthorn sorbet with black pepper cream, somewhat like the lollies we would eat as children with a little added kick.

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Juniper

When Masque turned five last year, we took the restaurant on a five-city tour. Our last stop was Ladakh. I remember walking through the Leh market, where I saw a woman selling juniper by the roadside. It's a berry we usually associate with gin, but we used it instead under a rack of lamb and smoked the entire thing to impart its flavour.

Lemon Verbena

This discovery was also made in Ladakh, where I saw a man carrying a big sack. I asked to take a look at the grassy thicket from his sack, smelt it and realised that this was lemon verbena, again a herb that I had extensively worked with in the west but not often in India. It's a spectacular herb; the first note is citrus, and it's grassy and earthy at the same time. For that dinner in Ladakh, we smoked local fish over it.

Afeem leaves

I like to talk about India through its ingredients. We recently cooked at *Pravaas*, a food and music festival in Gwalior hosted at the Jai Vilas Palace. We'd visited earlier to do some research and development before the event, where we travelled around the region meeting, eating and cooking with locals. We saw them use afeem, or poppy leaves. They're usually harvested in December, and the locals then use the leaves in a stew-like vegetable preparation. We eventually made a chutney of the leaves and served it with a black raisin-glazed quail kachori.

Fresh groundnuts

Gwalior was also where I saw fresh groundnuts being harvested for the first time. We tried them right from the plant—super tender and sweet. We used them to make a groundnut milk, which we served with a sole fish ceviche and pickled karwanda.

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A FINE BALANCE
The Marlborough Sauvignon Blanc from Brancott estate is a well-balanced wine with sw

Narthangai

When you look at it, it resembles a dried, blackened, almost rotten lemon, but it has the most beautiful citrusy aroma, and is often salted and dried, especially in the South. I came across it last August in Chennai, where one of our guests turned out to be an avid cook and invited us home for dinner the next day. The pickle was a staple at their dinner table; we got our hands on some and used it in a dessert of chocolate custard; the combination of the chocolate and citrusy narthangai was wonderful.

Jalpai

Commonly called the "Indian olive", jalpai is a fruit that grows only in the Sunderbans area. It's got a fairly short shelf life and found only in December and January. It's a fruit that's still very new—and fascinating—to me; if you miss it in these two months, that's it for the year. We brought some back and now are in the process of brining it first, like you would an olive, after which we will make a chutney of it and serve it with sweet potato and pickled chilli.

As told to Aditi Pai

A Royal Affair

Beauty, poetry, music and art have one thing in common; they are all sonnets of the divine. Horologists may argue the same for Breguet's Reine de Naples. We may agree, especially when it comes to this new interpretation from Breguet, issued in time for Valentine's Day. Long considered an emblem of feminine watchmaking, the Reine de Naples collection draws its inspiration from the first wristwatch in history, delivered in 1812 to Napoleon's sister, the elegant Caroline Murat, Queen of Naples. Today, this timepiece that originally featured an oblong shape has now turned oval. Each model in the contemporary collection, whether set in gems, beaded or lacquered, is an ode to femininity. The whimsical dial bears an airy sky whose white mother-of-pearl shimmer is sprinkled with 'clouds'. At 12 o'clock, the trail of love appears in red to indicate the 45-hour power reserve. As if suspended from the clouds, the finely hammered moon-phase display is composed of white gold. The chapter ring, located in the lower part of the dial, is set with hand-guilloché natural white mother-of-pearl, as is the centre of the small seconds display. The Breguet open-tipped blued steel hands indicate the hours and minutes. Since each second is priceless in the realm of love, they are marked by a red-lacquered double heart. To complete these poetic touches with the white gold bezel and case flange are sprinkled with a sparkling shower of 128 diamonds. It signs off in style, a blazing red alligator leather strap fitted with a white gold triple-blade folding clasp set with 28 diamonds. It's time to wear your heart on your sleeve and your love on your wrist.

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